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## VAGABOND DAUGHTER

Charlotte Charke, fabulous, romantic personality, was a product of an era of such full-bloodedness, lust and decadence as has never since burst into English history.

Daughter of Colley Cibber, a leading theatrical figure in eighteenth-century London, Charlotte was forced by poverty to take any employment that offered itself. She became actress, gentleman's valet, puppeteer, pastry-cook; and always the shadow of the dreaded debtors' prison loomed over her. Yet despite a checkered, often tragic career, she still had time for love and laughter. And her spirit remained unbroken.

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# VAGABOND DAUGHTER

BY  
LEILA MACKINLAY

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WARD, LOCK & CO., LIMITED  
LONDON AND MELBOURNE





## FOREWORD

*Author's Apology for the Life of Charlotte Charke, youngest daughter of Colley Cibber, Esq.*

Since no self-respecting autobiography of the eighteenth century neglected an author's apology for writing the narrative, the reader's introduction to Mrs. Charlotte Charke is presented in similar spirit.

To use her own words, she encountered "many strange and unaccountable vicissitudes of fortune" and professed to being a sufficient "oddity of fame" to make embellishments unnecessary. The first to acknowledge the "madness of my follies" and to admit that they "very severely recoiled upon myself", she was nevertheless a woman of supreme courage and optimism.

Her demand was not unreasonable: "Give us, at least, an honest chance to live."

(Quotation from Epilogue to *The Lover* by Theophilus Cibber, her brother.)

For actors and actresses of that day, particularly to those "travelling-tragedizers" to whom Charlotte some time belonged, the opportunity of a livelihood was no easy matter and many secretly must have echoed her outburst:

"I think it would be more reputable to earn a groat a day in cinder-shifting at Tottenham-Court, than stay with them."

The reader may ask: "How does it come about that the daughter of one of the great actor-managers (and Poet Laureate in addition) experienced such poverty?"

The answer would seem to be partly a matter of temperament and personal relationships—father and daughter were bitterly estranged over a considerable period—and not a little the result of those "vicissitudes of fortune".

The Cibber family was eccentric, to say the least. Colley used to have his periwig brought on to the stage in a sedan chair before he made his entrance. His dissolute son, Theophilus, professed a desire to be "a reasonable madman" (in his biography). Only Mrs. Cibber appears to have been "a woman of good sense". Even her brother becomes the reverse of sane.

That Charlotte grew up undisciplined, with tastes unsuited to a young lady, cannot be denied. But her follies never were vicious ones: the intention behind each fresh experiment was excellent.

Her critics have been many. Francesca D. Senior, in that admirable study of *The Life and Times of Colley Cibber* (Constable) writes:

"The bizarre pages of his wild daughter's autobiography" read "like a romance conceived under the influence of opium."

An unspecified critic, quoted in Chapter 10 of the same book, dismisses Charlotte as "a fair type of such weeds as spring spontaneously from the hot-bed of a corrupt civilisation."

W. Macqueen-Pope, in *Haymarket, Theatre of Perfection*, is more charitable. Acknowledging her to have been "a woman of many parts", he considered that the most important contribution made by her to theatrical history, was in the rôle of the first manageress of the Haymarket Theatre.

Or was it—the season as puppeteer, when she produced works, hitherto confined to human players, instead of pieces specially designed for puppets? The point is one that can be argued by experts along many lines.

The task of attempting a reasoned interpretation, on the basis of *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke* (youngest Daughter of Colley Cibber, Esq.) written by herself, and published in 1755, has not been easy. There are many discrepancies. The chronological order of events is chaotic and important facts and names are omitted. Nevertheless her own account of events has been taken in preference to re-constructions by eighteenth century and other critics.

Period is suggested by the general background and the interpolation of contemporary comments, together with the use of chapter epithets by writers of her day. A replica of the exact conversational habits of the times has not been attempted, lest it prove tedious to the reader. Wherever possible Charlotte's own words are incorporated into the dialogue.

Her careers—they ranged from pork butcher to puppeteer—have created convenient divisions of the story into chapters.

In form this is a picaresque novel, moving from place to place; from one adventure to the next. But that, too, is very much of the period.

If an epitaph to Charlotte be sought, let her share the lines

with which another actress of the day prefaces each volume of reminiscence:

“The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, of good and ill together.”

*(All's Well That Ends Well, Act IV, Sc. III)*  
from *Apology for the Life of George Anne Bellamy*.

*London 1954-55*





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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*History of the London Stage and Its Players* (1576-1903),  
H. Barton Barker (Routledge).

*Haymarket, Theatre of Perfection.* } By W. Macqueen-Pope  
*Drury Lane* } (Allens)  
*Ladies First*

*History of Everyday Things in England* (1500-1799), by M. and  
C. H. B. Quennel (Batsford).

*English Men and Manners in the Eighteenth Century*, by A. S.  
Tuberville (Oxford University Press).

The above books have been read in the light of general information upon the period and its relevant personalities. They are standard works, mainly contemporary. To the authors and publishers of the ones of more recent times, I would wish to acknowledge my indebtedness.

The main material, outside Charlotte Charke's own narrative, however, has been drawn from the following:

*Life and Times of Colley Cibber*, F. D. Senior, 1928 (Constable).

*Strolling Players and Drama in the Provinces* (1660-1765),  
Sybil Rosenfeld, M.A. (Cambridge University Press)  
and proofs of George Speaight's *The History of the  
English Puppet Theatre* (Harrap).

I am grateful, therefore, to Miss Senior and Messrs. Constable for permission to make the quotations in the Apology and for the use of general material elsewhere in the story. My thanks

are likewise due to Miss Rosenfeld and the Cambridge University Press in respect of her book. The information contained therein has been of great help in those portions of Charlotte's story which are concerned with the nine years spent "on the road".

I should also like to record my gratitude to the Society for Theatre Research for advice and assistance.

I have left George Speaight to the last, because to him there must be a more personal note of gratitude, quite outside the expressing of formal thanks to himself and Messrs. Harrap for being allowed to read the proofs of the book and to use facts relating to the Puppet Theatre.

Mr. Speaight passed on to me the fruits of his own considerable researches into the history of Charlotte Charke. To him must be attributed the important discovery of evidence that points to the identity of her second husband—made so secret by her in the narrative. An advertisement in the *General Advertiser*, relating to a performance at the New Wells on 3 June, 1746, mentions an "occasional epilogue written and spoken by Mrs. Sacheverel, late Mrs. Charke".

I have also accepted what might be termed the Odell Theory regarding Charlotte's daughter. He has suggested that she may have been the Mrs. Harman, buried in Trinity Church, New York, in 1773.

Nothing factual occurs in any text discovered by me to indicate the meeting and courtship either of Charlotte and Mr. Sacheverel or of Kitty and her husband. Invention of likely circumstances was unavoidable. I have done my best to make them a plausible outcome of events. Elsewhere, of course, there have been ample scenes indicated or described by Charlotte herself.

As Miss Rosenfeld wrote, in a letter to me: "It is a fascinating subject."

L.M.

## CHAPTER I

### FIRST—THE 'POTHECARY

*Mrs. Sullen*

*"Miracles, indeed, if they have cur'd any Body, but, I believe, Madam, the Patient's Faith goes farther toward the Miracle than your Prescription."*

THE BEAUX' STRATAGEM, Act 4  
*George Farquhar*

#### I

"Now I must go home and eat a child!"

Mr. Colley Cibber delivered the remark in his peculiar squeak of a voice, familiar to audiences of the Lane, of which theatre he was patentee.

With a comic grimace, he rose from the gaming table. The wooden bowl, with ormolu edging, was empty. A few minutes earlier it had held his rouleaux.

Ombra, Hazard or Loo—the result was much the same . . .

"How much am I in your debt, gentlemen?"

This was an unnecessary question, since Colley knew the answer all too well. Still it delayed the moment when his unwilling fingers must fumble in his vest pocket for the golden guineas.

"Which child have you a mind to sacrifice on the altar of chance?" one of the gamesters inquired, changing his brocaded coat round to its normal side, after wearing it inside out for better luck.

"That son of yours, Theophilus?"

Colley appeared to consider the point then said that he had not decided which of his several offspring should supply the meal! The debts settled, it became obvious that barely enough remained to pay the sedan chair back to his home in Charles Street. The alternative of a walk through London's dangerous by-ways, prey to footpads or worse, was not pleasant.

He took a last glance round the large gracious room where play had taken place. The waiter, stifling yawns, was ready to snuff the candles in the chandelier. Already daylight showed through the windows. The table, with its chairs drawn back and the cards tumbled, had an appearance of melancholy.

"I will give you good night, Gentlemen." Since no actor could resist a quotation, Colley added one of his lines of revision from the second Act of Shakespeare's *Richard III*.

"Poverty! The reward of honest fools."

Rich laughter greeted the remark.

Mr. Cibber had indeed a quaint and pleasing wit! He made his way to the double-doors with that air of peacock-majesty he used to such effect in the rôles of gay coxcomb on the stage. He was short and given to stoutness. His legs were unfortunately thin, which drew extra attention to the largeness of his feet. He was not unconscious of his physical shortcomings. That broad face mattered less than the shrillness of his voice—known to crack in moments of passion.

The porter asked whether Mr. Cibber desired him to call a "stand" (sedan chair). When the chairmen came at a trot, Colley removed his hat. This, added to the monstrous size of the periwig he wore, gave him an illusion of height but made his entry into the conveyance more difficult. Jostled from side to side in the stuffy, creaking chair, which retained the heavy scent used by some previous passenger, Colley felt for his snuffbox.

"The happiest young couple that ever took a leap in the dark."

That was how he had described himself when, as a young man of twenty-two, with an allowance of twenty pounds per annum from his father and earning a pound weekly in the theatre, he had committed himself to matrimony.

Colley thought grimly of the youth he had then been; pale, dismal, with "the aptness of my ear" his best attribute.

Before long his initial enthusiasm for marriage was tempered with the plaint that:

"My muse and my spouse are equally prolifick."

He grunted and reviewed the present situation.

For several years, Mrs. Cibber had been "meet" and "amiable"—as Shakespeare had it—without announcing any fresh addition to the family. Yet now, when she had reached the age of forty-five, and her husband felt he had a right to expect a permanent halt in her fertility, she was again to be brought to bed of a child. And that in a short matter of weeks.

Colley could not pretend an enthusiasm he was woefully far from feeling.

"Oh! how many torments be in the small circle of a wedding-ring!" he quoted to himself from his play, *The Double Gallant*.



He was aware of disloyalty to a wife, of whom, despite his many shortcomings, he was still fond. It was doubtful whether any other woman would have tolerated him as long. Besides the gambling, there was the drinking. And on occasion—

“Demme! A man must *be* a man!”

Lotteries, card games, racing, wagers and women! All of them could be equally disillusioning.

Colley sighed for the second time and letting his chin sink down upon his chest, dozed until the cessation of movement told him that he had arrived at his home. Grunting, he emerged from the sedan, gave the chairmen what little money was left in his pockets, and, with a terse good-night, entered his house.

Mrs. Cibber, if no longer the trim-figured Miss Shore, sister of the “Serjeant Trumpet of England”, whom Colley had married in the sixteen-nineties, was still a gentle, personable woman. Though her early acting career had been undistinguished, she had more enduring qualities. Tact in the handling of her foppish, cantankerous husband; skill in keeping their spirited youngsters from vexing him with too great frequency!

She did not inquire as to the fortune of the game. His glum manner was self-explanatory. It was not Mrs. Cibber’s custom to scold. She lived in an age when women had to bear with the excesses of their menfolk.

A gentleman might bow and exhibit every sign of outward politeness, even to the turning of an extravagant compliment, yet swear in the presence of a lady and avail himself of every coarse pleasure that offered itself. Even the ladies themselves who swooned and languished in public, also blasphemed and spat and beat a foolish serving wench with brutality.

Colley made a polite inquiry as to his wife’s health, then, having snuffed the candle she had left burning until his return, prepared to retire. There was still time for a few hours’ sleep before he need think of the theatre . . .

## II

At least Mrs. Cibber’s last child was not born in a storm—as her son, Theophilus, had been. A never-to-be-forgotten night, that twenty-sixth of November, 1703. Then Mrs. Cibber had been younger: better fitted for the task of child-bearing. Now, she was forty-five and not a little tired.

- She did not know whether to be glad or sorry that it was another girl. Perhaps on the whole Mrs. Cibber's greatest feeling was of relief.

The woman, who had been in attendance on her, later asked whether Mrs. Cibber would care for chocolate. Fashionable ladies always took a cup in their rooms in the morning and it wanted several hours until three o'clock dinner.

Mrs. Cibber, however, preferred "a glass of port". Her husband always spoke in terms of bottles—and by one, he generally meant two.

The child thrived. She was a lusty youngster with a demanding cry and they called her Charlotte.

It soon became apparent that the youngest Cibber was very much of an individualist. She was not vastly entertained by the diversions offered to children of her day. The little chap-books, with their woodcuts of nursery rhymes, bored her. She soon mastered the pictorial alphabets.

"A was an archer who shot at a frog."

The chapmen, or pedlars, who called on the household were disappointed in their sales. Charlotte found little use for the normal games of battledore and shuttlecock, hot cockles or trap ball. Hunt-the-Slipper she scorned. Bear-leader was better, provided she was the blindfold one protecting the "bear". Toy parachutes and peg tops did not come her way. And she refused to join in the game for little girls called "Queen Anne".

*"The ball is mine and none of yours.  
Go to the woods and gather flowers."*

"Why," Charlotte cried, "her father could write better poetry than that!" He did, too, in his plays!

As early as four years old she developed a self-confessed "fondness for a periwig."

Colley had a variety from which to choose. As a perruquier's advertisement would term it, there were "tye wigs" and "long bobs", with a handsome feather crown in the manner of a Tye-Crown, not to mention "Bag wigs", "Tuck-up wigs" and "Naturals."

Charlotte, who knew her alphabet in French before English, was keener on games of her own devising. In the summer season, her father rented part of a spacious house in Twickenham, set in its own grounds.

Creeping softly into the servants' hall very early one Sunday morning, shoes and stockings in hand, Charlotte proceeded to put into practice the idea of being "the perfect representative" of her "Sire".

She pinned up her little dimity coat, to supply the lack of breeches, then, with the aid of a broom, took down a waistcoat belonging to Theophilus and an "enormous bushy tie-wig" of Colley's.

Entirely encased as it were, she strutted, only to realise that a finishing touch was needed.

"A belt—and that silver-hilted sword——" That, together with the addition of one of Colley's large beaver hats, "laden with lace, as thick and broad as a brickbat."

Charlotte slipped out after the gardener, on his way to start the day's work. She scrambled down into a ditch. Her head barely showing above this trench, she paraded up and down, bowing her head, and aping Cibber.

A crowd did not take long to collect. Charlotte exulted, faced with this, her first audience. And they really *did* believe her to be the "Squire," she thought, strutting the more.

The rest of the Cibber family rose for the day and the youngest member's absence was soon noted. Mrs. Heron, mother of the actress, coming on the scene, was convulsed by the ludicrous spectacle.

"Good-morrow to you, Mr. Cibber!" she called in fun.

"Good-morrow to you, Marm!"

This reply, ending up in the famous squeak, was too much for Mrs. Heron. She clasped her aching sides, while tears ran down her painted cheeks.

Egad! This was too good for the Cibber family to miss!

"Colley—Mr. Cibber—All of you! Come! Witness the state and dignity of your daughter, Charlotte! I' faith she can act us all off the stage!"

The drollery of the little figure made it impossible for fond parents to be cross. Nevertheless the adventure was brought to an undignified end, with Charlotte borne away on the shoulders of the footman, summoned to collect her. She struggled, but there was nothing she could do. So she was taken indoors to be divested of her borrowed splendour, cleaned up from the dust of the ditch, and re-attired in garments suited to her sex.

When Mrs. Heron had expounded more fulsomely upon Charlotte's impersonation, Colley became silent. Mimicry was

not a thing to be taken lightly. Few hurts were worse than ridicule and he was never fond of a joke that told against himself.

As youngest, Charlotte came in for her share of spoiling. In those days, Colley's feelings were tender towards her. Some unenviable jealousy existed amongst the children. In particular, it came from his eldest daughter—later to rule his life and alienate from poor Charlotte what affection he still had for her. But Charlotte did not let the petty differences render her unhappy. Individualist that she was, she found closest companionship with her big brother, Theophilus. Did they not share the same tastes? Gilded ginger-bread, custard and gooseberry tarts! Besides, he looked very grand now he was a Winchester College boy. Theophilus, too, was an eccentric. At five years of age he had thrown himself on the ground to die—because he was denied the horse he craved.

Charlotte, never tired of her brother's stories, prompted in the telling of them.

"And what did Mamma do?"

"Bought me a pair of white gloves and gave me a handful of cherries to eat!"

"Was that when you had the scarlet coat with gold trimmings?"

Theophilus nodded, not averse to remembering such early glory.

Best of all, however, Charlotte liked the story of the stolen money.

"When you were"—her voice took on the Cibberian inflections—"a sad young dog". (And Theo had been called that, at only eight years old!)

A misdemeanour requiring subsequent attendance on the redoubtable Colley found that gentleman, as Theo disrespectfully termed it, "gone to bed in his cups".

The ever observant boy espied two golden guineas, fallen to the floor near the bed. The problem was—how to acquire them?

"So I kneeled beside him, saying, 'Pray, father, bless me.'"

While the surprised and gratified Colley stroked his son's head and bade him rise, the aforementioned son indulged in some timely sleight of hand.

"I touched the spankers and conveyed them to my pocket."

Charlotte laughed immoderately. Would she, given like opportunity, have done the same?



While the relationship between father and daughter was still satisfactory, an even closer bond existed between Mrs. Cibber and Charlotte. Indeed it was so deep and so strong that no circumstance could shatter it. In after years Charlotte was to write movingly of her mother's sweet nature and "fortitude of mind". The occasions when Mrs. Cibber lost her temper with Charlotte were not many. But when she did, the impression was lasting. With unusual obstinacy Charlotte would withhold forgiveness for a thrashing. On one occasion she did so for six whole months.

This took place when Charlotte was five. Mrs. Cibber was in poor health at the time, indeed she looked woefully ill—a fact that gave Charlotte cause for grief. Asses' milk was prescribed for Mrs. Cibber and donkey and foal added to the household, then "at Hampton-Town, near the Court".

Charlotte took a fancy to ride the foal, which was "about the height of a sizeable greyhound". Impetuosity was ever her failing and an idea conceived was soon put to practice. She told her plan to the members of "a small troop of young gentlemen and ladies, whose low births and adverse states" made them only too anxious to be sycophants of Miss Charlotte.

Mrs. Cibber's bridle and saddle were borrowed. "Yon beast is too small for a saddle" one of the boys said, with reasonable objection.

"We will leave it behind then," Charlotte cried, leading the way to the field where the foal was with her dam.

The bridle also being too big, garters were used. And in triumph, Charlotte rode astride into the town. Ahead, was a lad dancing to the "twelve penny fiddle" belonging to herself. Unfortunately they encountered Colley, who showed "Pleasure, pain and shame" at the sight. Humour finally triumphing, he gave vent to a witticism:

"Gad demme! An ass upon an ass!"

In after years Charlotte was first to admit that she had been "ridiculous and mischievous" in childhood. Somehow the oddest pranks would suggest themselves.

"Do you remember the old woman in Richmond, Theophilus?"

"The one who beat you so soundly?"

"Did I deserve the punishment, should you say?"

"The devil you did!"

The whole thing had been at her instigation. There was no



denying the truth, consequently the stick had fallen upon Charlotte, rather than upon her play-fellows. But it had been fun, making them take as many of the beldame's caps and "small linen" as were drying in the garden, tossing them into the brook and watching them being whisked down the Thames!

Already the days of the tomboy were numbered.

In view of Charlotte's obvious intelligence, Colley decided that she should be granted "a genteel and liberal education" of a kind suitable for a son instead of a daughter. He forthwith acquainted her with his plans.

"It is my pleasure that you should go to the school of Mistress Draper."

Charlotte was now eight years of age and he had hopes that the select academy in Park Street, Westminster, would be beneficial. Mrs. Draper was undoubtedly a woman of good sense. He liked to think that at her hands Charlotte would be less the tomboy and more of the young lady.

Lifting one eyebrow comically, he said, "I hope you will make yourself better acquainted with the needle."

She laughed, merrily unperturbed. La! She handled it "with the same clumsy awkwardness a monkey does a kitten."

### III

The average curriculum in the private academies where girls were taught consisted of English and calligraphy, simple arithmetic, needlework, drawing and dancing. In the more *élite* establishments, such as Mrs. Draper's, there was "music, French, and Italian", the latter being "Simply an adjunct to singing".

The teaching staff at Mrs. Drapers' included a Monsieur Flahaut, language master. Charlotte's earnest desire of improvement was quickly noticed by her tutor and when Mrs. Cibber paid a visit to the boarding school, Mr. Flahaut asked that the child might learn Latin as well as Italian.

"Whatever you, as her master of languages, advise," Mrs. Cibber exclaimed, in ready agreement.

Thanks to Mr. Flahaut, Charlotte was also instructed in geography. The necessary books, together with "two globes, caelestial and terrestrial," were borrowed from John Shore, Mrs. Cibber's Serjeant-Trumpet brother.

During the two years of schooling—and in the private home studies that followed—Charlotte took music from "the famous

Dr. King", then so old as to be able to give only "trifling instructions". Charlotte was not sorry when Mr. Young, "late organist of St. Clement's Danes", took over the instruction. Pianos had not long been introduced and it was Mr. Young's pleasure to seat himself at the keyboard, whilst Charlotte sang, in her clear voice, Thomas Arne's "Under the Greenwood Tree".

Mr. Grosconet coached her in the art of dancing. To the eager and attentive pupil, time spent in the classroom never can be wasted.

Mrs. Draper was well satisfied with Charlotte's progress and proceeded to give her a characteristic schoolmarm's homily upon leaving. Charlotte listened, eyes dutifully lowered, hands at her sides and feet neat in the position which Mr. Grosconet had taught her as correct.

Having expressed the hope that Charlotte would prove an example to the school and a justification of "her dear father's beliefs" in her, Mrs. Draper proceeded to quote a little Montaigne. If her accent was not that of Stratford-Atte-Bow, nor was it of Paris either. Still French was not her subject and the little Charlotte was fluent enough to translate for herself.

"As one might say of me that I have only made here a collection of other people's flowers, having provided nothing of my own but the cord to bind them together."

Automatically Charlotte knew the quotation to be from Montaigne's *Essais*.

#### IV

Charlotte had no particular feelings about leaving Mrs. Draper's academy. The child had a confidence not only in her own ability to profit by the education already received, but to extend the range of scholarship under the guidance of home tutors and ultimately her own efforts.

Once again Mrs. Cibber's health occasioned family anxiety. Her onset of asthma had caused Colley to rent a fresh house over a period of years. This time Hillingdon was chosen and it was hoped the change of air would be beneficial.

Charlotte liked Hillingdon less well than Richmond. For one thing the Cibber establishment was more isolated and offered fewer diversions. The master of the house was often detained in London, not only by the management of his theatre, but by such attractions as were offered by White's Club and the Coffee Houses.

The child adapted herself and made the "solitude as agreeable" as possible. As she grew to her 'teens so she turned again to pursuits of a more masculine variety.

"In the frosty mornings" she would set out on a shooting expedition on the Common. Her proficiency was soon equivalent to that of the person "described in *The Recruiting Officer*" as being "capable of destroying all the venison and wild fowl about the country." Certainly she considered herself quite "the best fowler or marksman", when she returned home with her "bag". Her self-opinion ran high in those days.

Mrs. Cibber neither encouraged nor discouraged these pursuits. The organisation of her household required her main energy and the days were many when she felt so enfeebled that she was glad to keep to her room.

Charlotte again incurred neighbourly displeasure. A very strait-laced lady called in person upon Mrs. Cibber to expostulate that "such diversions" were unfitting for a girl of fourteen.

"I' faith she might kill someone with the gun or have an accident that will maim her for life."

It was obvious that the mother had not taken so serious a view—or it might be more accurate to say that the possibilities of disaster, until presented to her by an outside observer, had not occurred to her. The result of the interview was confiscation of Charlotte's gun. Her heartbreak was quickly succeeded by a return of the fighting spirit.

"Grant me some wild expressions, Heavens, or I shall burst," she cried, with "Lady Lurewell" of *The Constant Couple*.

She climbed up and reached for "the muscatoon" on the kitchen mantelpiece. But shooting down the neighbour's chimney merely wasted a lot of powder and shot!

## V

While at Hillingdon Charlotte succumbed to one of those mysterious and unexplainable illnesses which attack adolescents. Mrs. Cibber became truly alarmed. Indeed the possibility that Charlotte might not recover had to be considered. She was therefore despatched "to Thorly, in Hertfordshire", to be placed under the care of Dr. Hales, a family relative, who was also a physician of repute. Charlotte, protesting only feebly over the separation from home, went to be restored in health and—though this was not told her in so many words—to

be made into a housewife. Time—and care—gave her back her normal vigour, since her constitution was sound enough. The other project was less successful.

"I do not care to ornament a well-disposed, elegant table," she told the doctor. Neither did she like to pore "over a piece of embroidery", as did the young ladies of the family.

The doctor smiled a little ruefully. It was indeed difficult to make Charlotte a useful member of the household along desired lines. Her interests ran to "cattle and husbandry". She was usually found in the stable with a curry-comb in her hand.

"Tender advice" and "threats" were unavailingly tried. At last Dr. Hales, with justifiable pique asked:

"And pray what *would* you like to do, Charlotte?"

Her answer surprised him, "To study physick, Cousin."

At least that showed she had an interest in something!

"It can but be tried," Mrs. Hales suggested.

Soon the girl was happily helping the doctor; and with surprising efficiency at that. He found how alert and receptive her brain was in matters that absorbed her attention. Charlotte was also provided with a little horse of her own. She rode around on its back, visiting invalids to inquire of their progress, altogether entering into a new character study: that of a physician. As she had "believed" herself into being her father back in that Twickenham ditch, so she now was full of the doctor's mannerisms.

This period was terminated in two years' time by the death of Mrs. Hales.

Charlotte was not long back in Hillingdon before she persuaded her mother to listen sympathetically to a "project".

"Mamma, if only you would let me have a little closet, built into that room which goes a-begging."

"'Tis true the apartment is seldom used. For what would you press it into service?"

"I would run a 'dispensatory'."

After shooting, this seemed harmless enough and Charlotte, casting herself now as young Lady Bountiful, was soon summoning the old women of the neighbourhood to come along for treatment. Her patients were ignorant, which was probably as well, since she had to keep herself informed of ailments and cures by frequent reference to "Salmon, Culpepper and other books".

But Charlotte had never lacked a persuasive manner. She was brisk and efficient in her dealings with the people who



consulted her. She had absorbed much at the doctor's house and trusted to her wits and intelligence to fill in the gaps in her scientific knowledge.

Full of confidence that "the dispensatory" would be more successful still with the addition of some stock, she made the journey into Uxbridge. She soon found what she required: a shop "an emblem of that described in *Romeo and Juliet*".

The apothecary's widow, who was in charge, listened sympathetically to Charlotte's story and they discussed the latter's requirements.

"'Tis good of you to have entrusted me with a cargo of combustibles."—But less good to have sent the bill for them to Colley Cibber, Esq.

He descended wrathfully upon the Hillingdon household.

"And what, pray, is the meaning of this fresh folly of yours, Charlotte?"

Mrs. Cibber tried to smooth matters between father and daughter.

"The child meant no harm."

Colley informed his daughter, in the words he had written into *Richard III*, that if she persisted in such hare-brained schemes she would:

"—Wallow naked in December's snow——"

"By bare remembrance of the Summer's heat." (Finishing the quotation for him.)

He frowned, in no mood for geniality. Striking an attitude betokening decision unalterable, he let it be known that "Doctor Charlotte" would have "no further credit"—by his order.

A lesser spirit would have admitted defeat. Not so Charlotte! She merely turned her attention to herbs. In any case they were considerably easier to acquire.

What was it that Shakespeare—or was it her father?—said about herbs in *Richard III*?

"Small herbs have grace, great weeds do grow apace."

Never lost for a quotation, she decided she preferred the lines in *Romeo and Juliet*:

"O mickle is the powerful grace that lies in herbs, plants, stones and their true qualities."

By-gone months had brought reputation to Charlotte. People believed in her ability to help them. Into her "dispensatory" one day came an old lady whom she did not remember having seen on any previous occasion.



"It is the rheumatism, Miss. That—together with a disorder of the stomach."

Charlotte assumed the thoughtful, considering expression copied from Dr. Hales.

"What remedies to apply?"

Obviously it would be as well to gain a little time for reflection. Dismissing the crone with a promise of relief "by an inward and outward application" by bedtime, Charlotte considered until finally inspiration came. There had been a great deal of recent rain. She went out into the garden, gathering all the snails she could find. Parts of them she made into a syrup with brown sugar. On one of her own labels she wrote: "To be taken a spoonful once in two hours."

Affixing this to the bottle containing the loathsome concoction, she boiled the rest of the snails, together with some green herbs and mutton fat. The result was an ointment.

"I had as well put in a bottle of hartshorn and sal volatile—for good measure."

For good measure or against the possible effects of the snail syrup? Charlotte did not have either article and was forced to borrow both—she preferred to regard it as borrowing rather than stealing!—from Mrs. Cibber's closet.

The prescription, if unorthodox, nevertheless had a happy effect upon the patient. In three days, the old crone came hopping along, expressing herself cured.

"If you could see your way to let me have some more of the same physick——"

Charlotte's brain functioned with accustomed speed. At that moment there was "an extreme drought". This meant that not a snail was to be seen.

Assuming a grave, judicial manner, Charlotte told the old credulous one that she should rather "wait 'till a return of her pains". Otherwise, "the remedy might possibly lose its effect." This was, indeed, sound common sense!

"Keep warm," Charlotte advised and "Drink no malt liquor". If "any alteration" occurred Dr. Charlotte might again be summoned.

When the old woman had gone, profuse in her gratitude, Charlotte reflected that the success of any physician was "founded on the faith of the patient". She had to smile to herself over the touching trust placed in doctors—and their disciples—was not she one of the latter?

Nevertheless the whole business of being an apothecary was

beginning to pall. She was unable to procure the necessary drugs for lasting success in her venture. She could not make do for ever on such herbs as she could come by in orthodox or unorthodox ways. And Mrs. Cibber was bound to notice any further drain on her restoratives.

All things considered, Charlotte had had enough of "the dispensatory".

"I shall drop my practice," she decided.

Already her eager, acquisitive brain was seeking a fresh interest. As Jonson said, "Ambition like a torrent ne'er looks back."

Thus early in life Charlotte learned how to cut her losses and pass on to the next adventure.

## CHAPTER 2

### TO GARDENER AND GROOM

*"I am really as fond of my garden as a young author of his first Play, when it has been well received by the town."*

From LETTERS OF LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGUE, 1748

#### I

In the years to come, Charlotte was to look back on the period of her adolescence with a kind of wonderment, finding it hard to believe that she ever had known such stability. Had she been too fortunate, enjoying by right those comforts befitting the youngest—some said, the favourite—daughter of Mr. Cibber?

Blessed in the love of both parents.

"Partly thro' my own indiscretion (and, I am too well convinc'd, from the cruel censure of false and evil tongues) since my maturity, I lost that blessing."

She was to write those very words in the anguish of forfeiting her father's affection and esteem.

But at Hillingdon, she was still secure. Many of her happiest moments were when, in jovial mood, Colley would talk to her about his early struggles in the theatre. And who shall say he did not gild them a little to please the girl, who stood wide-eyed and attentive, by his chair? He spoke of the times of the Restoration, when licentious comedy flourished and how he himself, as a young and untried dramatist, had captured the subsequent change of public taste with *Love's Last Shift*. It was the fore-runner of honest, sentimental comedy; where rakes reformed by the final act to repent their mistaken wildness.

"Mr. Southern said to me, "Young man, your play is a good one, and it will succeed, if you do not spoil it by your acting'." Colley gave a dry chuckle. One day he would write a book; an apology for his own life, and in it he would seek to give "as true a picture of myself as natural vanity will permit me to draw."

"Then you are vain, Father?" Charlotte inquired, displaying a certain absence of tact. He let his hand touch her hair with a gesture at once affectionate and forgiving.

"I look upon my follies as the best phase of my fortune."

The things which he told her about players and the art of playing were not unheeded, though at that time she had no thought of making a career for herself on any stage.

He told her, for instance:

"The voice of a singer is not more strictly ty'd to time and tune, than that of the actor in theatrical elocution: the least syllable too long, or too slightly dwelled upon——"

Attentive she listened, conscious that he needed an audience—even as insignificant and solitary a one as herself.

"—which very syllable, if rightly touch'd, shall, like the heightening stroke of light from a master's pencil, give life and spirit to the whole."

He spoke of Mrs. Verbruggen's virtuosity; of Booth, "an undergraduate of the buskin"; in homage to Betterton and finally upon the question of false applause.

"The theatre is so turbulent a sea, and so infested with pirates, what poetical merchant, of any substance, will venture to trade in it?"

Charlotte did not ask why then her father—and it would seem Theophilus, too—must venture in such turbulent seas.

"The short life of beauty is not long enough to form a complete actress." As he spoke, he glanced at his daughter with peculiar intentness. Was his Charlotte likely to grow to beauty? She was tall for a girl and lean withall. The features were a little smudged by immaturity, but her hair lay well from its central parting. She had an expressive face. He could not help feeling glad that in her there was none of the rugged ugliness of her undersized brother, Theophilus.

Part of the six weeks following 1 August, when London's two theatres closed their doors for the season, Colley spent at Hillingdon. As Charlotte said "a winter residence in the country was not altogether so pleasing" as during the summer. Man of the city that Colley was, he did not altogether relish rustication either. Days—and more especially nights—passed with aggravating slowness. At his age he knew he should begin to take life more easily, yet he had the same feverish activity of mind as when a stripling.

His writing and the adaptations of other people's plays did not occupy all the hours he could wish. True he could escape

to London and other places where out-of-work players congregated in the hope of employment; waiting for the eye of a visiting manager to notice such existence.

On what could he lay a wager in the country, forsooth! And how he missed those gaming tables, laid out in readiness for the play!

His wife was too often ailing, which threw him in the company of his youngest daughter; with Charlotte he had more in common than with the others of his brood. The girl had sharp wit and as was not always the case with her sex, intelligence, too. He could talk plays and the theatre with her and even though as yet she appeared to have no leaning towards acting, his opinions and his views must have sown their influence in the rare fertility of her brain.

The Charlotte of Hillingdon days was much occupied with out-of-door interests. And for a period, at least, they were harmless diversions. Laid aside were the gun and the "muscatoon": taken up the "pruning-knife" and the curry-comb. "A very pleasing and healthful exercise," was how she herself described the pursuit of green-fingers, shortly combined with the additional rôle of unofficial groom.

Colley, catching sight of his daughter, bent to the task of seed setting, watched awhile the way in which she mimicked the movements—those she had seen, and imagined as being right and proper to the gardener.

"Tell me, child, why do you adopt so odd a manner?"

"Is it not proper to imitate the actions of those persons, whose characters I choose to represent?"

"Egad, you are as changeable as Proteus!"

She was nothing if not thorough and once a part was conceived, she lived it to the full.

After having worked "two or three hours in the morning", she would disdain to sit and eat the inelegant meal of her selection. Instead, she preferred to stand, with "a broiled rasher of bacon upon a luncheon of bread in one hand" and some implement of her trade in the other. Just as she had discoursed with apparent knowledge on diseases and cures, in the rôle of Dr. Charlotte, so, with the same enthusiasm she now discussed plants. Or, if it were the turn for being groom, the necessary properties would be changed to "a halter and a horse-cloth", which she carried indoors with her and threw awkwardly onto a chair.

"Must you, Charlotte?" On occasion Mrs. Cibber raised a



mild voice in protest. She did not enjoy seeing these offending items laid—likely as not—on one of the best Hepplewhites.

"They are the emblems of my stable profession," Charlotte exclaimed, in the gruff voice that went with the impersonation. As *Hamlet* advised the players, she suited the words to appropriate actions! "A shrug of the shoulders and a scratch of the head."

Sometimes she would demand "a small beer", rattling on in this wise:

"God bless you make haste, I have not a single horse dressed or watered and here 'tis almost eight o'clock, the poor cattle will think I've forgot 'em; and to-morrow they go a journey, I'm sure I'd need take care of 'em."

Mrs. Cibber smiled thinly and not for the first time gave up the unsurmountable task of seeking to reform so individual a daughter.

"She will tire the sooner," Colley said, "if we leave her be."

The much vaunted "journey" might prove no more than "an afternoon's jaunt to Windsor", which lay within seven miles of the Cibbers' house. Yet Charlotte adopted as many airs and undertook the same painstaking preparations as if they were bound for "five hundred miles" instead of a mere seven.

"If only the child would display the same enthusiasm for things that are fitting to the gentler sex."

Colley agreed with his wife that in truth Charlotte should have been born to the breeches. She might have made a better boy than many. All the same he shared the hope of Charlotte's ultimate reversal to ways "genteel".

Colley was a busy man, with little wish to devote undue time to family problems. They were woman's business!

## II

During Charlotte's country-working period, he had to go across to France. Thus fortunately he missed a painful scene that took place amongst the domestic staff.

"The servant who was in the capacity of groom and gardener"—officially that was to say—came swaggering into the house one afternoon, full of the local equivalent of "anno domini", as the landlord in *The Beaux' Stratagem* called his ale. Quarrelsome and abusive, the servant was soon shouting invective at his fellow domestics. The rumpus grew loud enough for Mrs. Cibber to notice. She interfered, only to be

berated as soundly as the rest of those present. Nothing remained but precipitant dismissal. More invective and insolence followed when at last the mistress of the house retired from the domestic regions; she was more upset than a woman in better health might have been. A tender-hearted soul, she hated exerting forceful authority.

"Mr. Cibber would have dealt with the varlet far better," she exclaimed, not just once, but several times. "Ah, me, how I detest anything in the nature of unpleasantness. Charlotte, dear, my *sal volatile*—I confess I feel altogether ill——"

Alongside a natural concern of a loving daughter for a mother's very genuine indisposition, ran a curious excitement.

"Oh inexpressible transport," Charlotte thought. "Now I shall have the full possession of the garden and the stables."

Later in the day, Mrs. Cibber began to feel disquieted on the subject of the dismissed servant.

"Those are his footsteps beneath the chamber-windows."

"Unmistakably," agreed Charlotte. "Our neighbours observed him, hovering, for several hours."

As the family had a considerable quantity of plate, Mrs. Cibber quickly envisaged a midnight attempt at breaking into the house.

"If only your father—or Theophilus—was here——" the poor distracted woman bewailed the absence of one, indeed of both.

Charlotte might have answered "in me you have a better man than either."

For once prudence surprisingly stayed her tongue. She was all too impetuous in her remarks and such a sally, however humorous its intent, might have detracted from the position of esteem in which the menfolk were held. Though Charlotte might believe herself an equal, there was still an official acceptance as it were, of their superiority.

However, she took command with a breezy efficiency most reassuring to her distressed parent.

"La! Not only might we be robbed, but murdered! Gather up all the plate and have it placed in a large basket by my bedside." Charlotte further stripped both hall and kitchen of fire-arms. These consisted variously of her "little carbine . . . a heavy blunderbuss, a muscatoon and two brace of pistols."

Having loaded the entire armoury before retiring, she made herself lie awake from midnight until three a.m., which seemed

to be the most likely period "for an invasion". Nothing happened, except a dog "barked at the moon". This was enough!

Describing the scene in after years, she wrote:

"I bounced from my repository with infinite obligations to the cur, and fir'd out of the window piece after piece, re-charging as fast as possible, 'till I had consumed about a pound of powder, and a proportionate quantity of shot and balls."

Not surprisingly, the household was alarmed by the sound of such nocturnal volleying. The dog's bark changed to a doleful howl. Mrs. Cibber, in trembling concern, rang her bell. Charlotte, smelling strongly of battle, her face and hands blackened, ran at once to her mother's room, to be greeted with an agonised:

"Charlotte! Whatever is amiss?"

"All danger is past," came the assurance. "I heard the villain decamp on the first firing."

"Heaven be praised," Mrs. Cibber said, still panting a little, as her daughter eased her up from the pillows.

Charlotte was never one to allow facts to spoil a scene. As she had conceived the adventure, so she almost believed in the flying heels of the marauder. In truth the servant had departed straight for London earlier in the day: not because of the impressive defence of the Cibber stronghold! She made the discovery afterwards and kept the information discreetly to herself.

Meanwhile she lorded it as heroine of the hour, consoling the frightened staff and members of the family, shivering in their apprehension in the corridor outside the mistress's room. Striking an impressive attitude, Charlotte, her height noticeable in the doorway, made a cheerful announcement to those gathered in uncertainty without.

"There is not the least danger! My constant firing will be the means of preventing any. Is not the loss of a little sleep preferable to the loss of your lives?"

Charlotte, entirely happy, exulted in that self-created power which gave her the subsequent right, "once in ten minutes", to waste "ammunition to no purpose". Not until she had used up that which she had in stock, did she feel able to relax into dreams about the night's glaring exploit.

It did seem that Mrs. Cibber's excessive love of the last born blinded the good lady's reason, otherwise she could not have

tolerated "follies" which, Charlotte herself would be the first to admit as wholly "ridiculous".

"But where the heart is partially engaged, we have frequent instances of its clouding the understanding, and making dupes of the wisest."

### III

The one person who persistently saw through Charlotte was her eldest sister. A sour, jealous-minded girl, carpingly resentful of the indulgence the "baby" received.

"Really, Mother, I do not know how you support her nonsense! All that shooting to no purpose. If *I* had been here——" Mrs. Cibber lowered her glance, a little flush appearing in her cheeks.

"Are you not a trifle hard on Charlotte, dear?"

"She's such a monstrous mountebank. Going around dressed as a boy—placing herself on a par with the *servants*" and the eldest Miss Cibber gave the word the italics which, in her opinion, it merited. "In any case," she went on. "There was no need for all that alarm. The fellow had already fled Hillingdon, so I heard tell."

"I never listen to tales," Mrs. Cibber spoke sharply.

The other gave a bitter smile. "Never a word against your beloved Charlotte!"

But not even sisterly friction could spoil the extravagant joy Charlotte experienced in gardening. Ideas, which she never lacked for long, had a steady flow. She saw herself as the man's "proper successor". She went conscientiously about her several duties with more care than ever the employed help had displayed.

The fact that an odd job fellow had been dismissed by the Cibbers became quickly known and gave her cause for some uneasiness regarding her own temporary position.

"I hear tell your mother seeks a man for hire."

They said it in Uxbridge and every "little adjacent village". Seeing these congenial duties were in danger of being stolen, Charlotte took up position as porter at the gates to the house. This gave her an immediate advantage. She could meet the applicants and turn them aside before they had a chance to make legitimate inquiries. They found, instead of a man, Miss Charlotte Cibber herself: a little unexpected and the cause of instant nervousness.

"I've come, m'm, about the post——"

"There is none to fill!"

Some were more persistent than others.

"I'd heard tell Mrs. Cibber was in need of a man to tend the garden and look to the horses."

"You heard wrongly, my man," in tones of supreme authority.

At this point Charlotte proceeded with the invention of a suitable story, calculated to stop future inquiries. She gave out that they had "received letters from France" assuring them that Mr. Cibber himself had "hired a man at Paris to serve in that office".

Not surprisingly the maids wondered why Miss Charlotte should spend such an unaccountable amount of her time at the gate. Since serving wenches were romantic at heart, they asked themselves whether it could be that Miss Charlotte was having an assignation with some lover? Even ladies of quality married as early as fifteen and no girl was too young to enjoy amorous dalliance. Not after she had left the nursery, that was to say.

"What, *her*?" One of the younger serving maids suppressed a giggle.

There was a more or less general admission that considering Miss Charlotte's mode of dress and manner it was not, perhaps, likely as had at first been thought.

"Why a young lady should want to go around in men's breeches——" the pert maid, who waited upon Mrs. Cibber, gave a flick to her skirt and a toss of the head under its cap of service.

"Reckon Miss Charlotte should've been a boy," ventured the rather half-witted hired help from the village.

"Well she's not, so there!"

"A nice-looking young lady *her* be, when her dresses as such," he went on, dogged in his defence.

The others mocked him for his championship and he went off to undertake some of the lowly tasks that fell to his duty.

Mrs. Cibber, visiting her daughter in the garden, was moved to admire the arrangement of some plants, with which Charlotte had taken obvious pains.

"Do you imagine that any of your other children would have done as much at my age?" This, was said while resting on a spade and to the accompaniment of "a significant wink and a nod."



"Mayhap—they——"

"Come, come, madam; let me tell you, a pound saved is a pound got." At that Charlotte blithely resumed her digging, anxious to keep Mrs. Cibber in a mood of admiration.

#### IV

An account of the Hillingdon period in Charlotte's life would be incomplete without reference to the last escapade in which she figured. Indeed, this had an effect more salutary than any that had preceded it. Information was received to the effect that "a very fine young horse" was up for sale in Uxbridge. The animal was qualified "to draw a chaise". Colley had said that he intended to buy another horse, on his return from France. And the merest intimation of such a thing was sufficient for Charlotte to act!

Mrs. Cibber, in bed with one of her worst attacks of asthma, was too sick by far to keep herself informed of the movements of her youngest daughter. The rest of the household did not bother themselves either—in the absence of the eldest Miss Cibber. Therefore Charlotte, as usual, was free to come and go at her will.

She went to the house of the man who owned the horse, asking to have the animal forthwith harnessed and put to the chaise. The man knew that Miss Cibber frequently drove her father's horses around the countryside. There was no reason for anxiety. Besides, a quick sale was all the better, since the animal had certain undesirable qualities. He had been badly broken and was quite unmanageable.

Knowing nothing of this, Charlotte set forth in gay mood. No sooner did she reach Uxbridge Common than the gelding proceeded to do his worst. He bolted, dragging the chaise, with Charlotte holding the reins as best she could, but totally unable to stop the mad stampede.

"I doubt I shall see Hillingdon again," she thought, genuinely frightened. All her cunning with horses was unavailing. On they went, traversing "hills and dales".

The horse was as subtle as he was spirited. In less time than could be thought, they had completed a circle and the "barbarous gallop" ended up in the cart-run of the owner's house. A three year old child, haplessly in the path of the stampede, soon lay sprawled on the ground.

"Grief and surprise" took such a hold on Charlotte's spirits

that for almost the first time in her life she was rendered speechless.

Knees shaking, face white, she crawled rather than climbed from the chaise. The horse, at a standstill at last, switched its tail and tossed its foam-flecked head, the steaming sweat rising like a vapour from its heaving flanks.

The child was brought to her by the outraged parents, accompanied by a readily collected mob. A quick glance reassured Charlotte that the child was at least alive. Now that something was demanded of her, she collected herself and found her voice. At first it was only a squeak, more pinched even than that of her father at its least effective.

"The infant must be examined by a surgeon."

The authority in her manner was an instant help with the grumbling dissemblers. The medical man was found and he quickly pronounced a complete absence of serious damage.

"A miraculous escape indeed! Apart from a small graze on the neck——"

For Charlotte the local side of the affair was put to rights at the cost of a shilling and a shoulder of mutton.

But it did not end there.

A doubly industrious courier had run to acquaint Mrs. Cibber with the news that her wild daughter "kill'd a child".

Charlotte hurried home as expeditiously as she could, but the courier had been there in advance of her. Poor Mrs. Cibber was in a state of complete collapse and, on Charlotte's arrival, still unconscious.

It was only with difficulty that she was brought round.

"Mother, I do assure you it was an error. The stupefied wretch should not have alarmed you so."

"The shock—the surprise—they were too much——"

"Mother, dearest mother——"

The contrite girl knelt at the bedside, gravely frightened by the wan appearance of her much-loved parent.

After this Charlotte lapsed into a kind of melancholy strange in one of her youth and volatile spirits.

To the extreme surprise of the neighbourhood she became, for a little while, rather stupidly dull.

Mrs. Cibber may be forgiven for preferring this phase. She tried to believe Charlotte's repeated protestations to the effect that the episode of the chaise had:

"Put a period to the fertility of my mischievous genius."

## CHAPTER 3

### WIFE AND PLAYER

*Lady Teazle.*

*"I, who was late so volatile and gay,  
Like a trade-wind must blow all one way,  
Bend all my cares, my studies, and my vows,  
To one dull rusty weathercock—my spouse!"*

*Mr. Colman's Epilogue to  
THE SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL*

#### I

It was not the intention of the Cibbers to dwell permanently in the country and when the tenancy of the Hillingdon house came to an end, a return to London was made. Mrs. Cibber's health was no worse for the removal and in many ways she was glad to be back in town.

To Charlotte the change proved an immediate tonic. Though she still professed to have no acting aspirations, it was not unnatural that she should find herself at least partially caught up in the world of the theatre.

How innocently it all began. First, the affectionate and not undutiful daughter's wish to see her parent act.

"If you have a mind to accompany your mother," Colley observed, beaming, while Charlotte rejoiced that she was so obviously in the happy possession of her father's heart.

There had seemed no danger in Drury Lane, where Mr. Colley Cibber, as patentee, was a man of consequence. What possible harm to mingle after in the Green Room, meeting again members of his Company—some of whom had known her in childhood.

"La! I confess you are become quite a woman!" Anne Oldfield exclaimed. She was still that matchless performer; one to whom the bright-eyed, eager Charlotte could look in admiration of an incomparable art. And there was pretty, gay Kitty Clive, at that time regarded as "a young, but promising actress."

"Are you really the daughter of King Coll?" Twinkling-

eyed, Kitty let slip the nickname by which he was known amongst less reverent players.

Charlotte, amused, said that she was indeed.

"Why," Kitty exclaimed, half in surprise, "you are almost as tall as a boy!" Charlotte took the teasing in good part. She liked the warm, high-spirited players. The unconventional in herself went out to them. Besides, who could be dull in such company?

"Come, child, let us drink to your own début in the theatre!" Mistress Clive—formerly Miss Rafter—pushed a glass of porter towards Charlotte.

To the glee of the Green Room, the young girl downed it in a few gulps.

The amusement this caused subsided a little when Colley himself joined them.

"What do ye think of her, eh?" he demanded of no one in particular and yet all at once and the same time.

"She'll act us off the boards—if we so allow," cut in Mistress Thurmond. (All actresses, whether single or married, were styled mistress.)

"Oh, but I am not going to become an actress."

A chorus of incredulity greeted Charlotte's protest.

"What—then?"

It was on the tip of Charlotte's tongue to say something to startle them—such as, perhaps, "a highwayman"—instead she contented herself with shaking her head, expressing indecision.

Colley put an arm round his daughter's shoulders and fell to his favourite pastime of quotation. As they walked from the Green Room together, a young man, with a fiddle in his hand, drew back against the wall in order that they might pass.

Charlotte had a confused impression of bold, challenging eyes and good looks.

"Who was that young man, Father?" she inquired, when they were a little distant.

"Oh, er—Charke. Richard Charke!"

"And he plays in the orchestra?"

Colley nodded. Opinion had it that young Charke stood a good chance of succeeding Richard Jones as first fiddle. Charke was more than a violinist. He composed music as well as played it. Indeed, Charlotte learned he was busy contriving a "medley overture"—quite a new idea, which he was said to have invented. There was also a not unengaging piece called

"Charke's Hornpipe". In addition to his musical activities, he gave instruction in the genteel art of dancing and was known amongst his fellow musicians as "a man of humour".

It was, perhaps, inevitable that the next adventure of Charlotte's should be that of falling in love.

She had had little to do with young men; particularly those as practised in the art of attracting "foolish young girls" as Richard Charke.

Their acquaintanceship was easily contrived. Charlotte, "credulous" as she later saw herself, had been attracted by that first, challenging glance in the passage way. Richard had made it his business to pursue that advantage of surprise. He knew well enough who Charlotte was. What better scheme than to become son-in-law to the influential Mr. Cibber?

Richard's affairs were, in truth, "in a very desperate condition". As he argued, the father was "successful" and "the wench comely". Why then not pay his addresses to the young lady? Old Cibber was said to dote on the child, so hard-headed Richard did not envisage any great difficulties in his suit.

The challenging glance was followed by a smile of recognition on the next occasion. Then, bolder still, the polite half question was formed by lips accustomed to charm.

"You will be Miss Cibber? Miss *Charlotte* Cibber?" A little tender emphasis of the christian name—as if the speaker were at once shy and eager to pronounce the syllables.

She caught her breath, aware that her heart—which until that moment had given no cause for concern—was undergoing peculiar sensations.

"And you—are Mr. Charke——" after hesitation she added, "of the hornpipe."

"How can it be that my insignificant little composition has been brought to your notice?"

"I—heard tell of it."

The saucy minx! Of course she had been making inquiries about him. What young lady did that, unless she were at least—interested—in the subject of inquiry?

"It's a very ordinary hornpipe," Richard said, with delightful modesty.

"I wish——"

"Yes?" gently encouraging.

"I might hear it——" rather hastily: "Some time."

"What could be easier?" Richard, rarely without his violin



in the theatre, then and there began to play his hornpipe with what, to Charlotte, seemed truly dazzling virtuosity.

Instinct made her feet move in time to the melody. Hardly realizing what she did, she began to dance.

"Capital! Capital!"

The tempo grew more spirited and Charlotte's dancing less inhibited. Soon they were laughing together as if they were old friends.

"I see I would have nothing to teach you in the art of dancing, Miss Charlotte."

"I' faith you exaggerate my proficiency."

"You have genius—true genius——"

A tinkling laugh rang out: it belonged to the irrepressible Kitty Clive, who came to warn those two—whom she already envisaged as future lovers—that the august Mr. Cibber was coming back stage.

"I must away," Richard cried, in somewhat unmanly confusion. His fiddle gave a last twang as his finger accidentally touched a string in his flight.

Kitty, who knew so much of love, stood looking a moment at Charlotte with a kind of tender compassion.

"You poor child!"

Poor? What a strange thing to say! Why, Charlotte was rich: incomparably rich. Had she not won the admiration of the man with whom she had every reason to believe herself in love?

Charlotte spent an increasing amount of her time at Drury Lane. She no longer hung around the Green Room: or those parts of the theatre where Colley spent his working hours. She was interested only in the quarters of the musicians. With Richard Charke playing, even their practice-time had an enchantment

If she happened to be in front, a performance held its major interest during the intermissions. Then she would watch for the little smile that Richard was sure to reserve just for her.

Soon he was, as she termed it, "pleased to say soft things" and to flatter herself into "a belief of his being an humble admirer". How was she to know that his professed passion was not "real love" but "only interest"? What chance had she against such wooing? Indeed what chance would she have wished to have had?

In her eyes it was going to be "a fine thing to be married".

She responded to his love-making with a passion that not merely equalled, but bid fair to exceed that of Richard himself.

"Charlotte, dearest Charlotte"—and he would kiss her, surprised that at first she should have known so little of that art. He had been used to women of all kinds—not least to those her brother, Theophilus, was pleased to call "Drurian Doxies". This freshness and innocence was novel. In so far as Richard was capable of tenderness, he responded to her almost childlike caresses. Gradually, under his tuition, she began losing that enchanting shyness and approached something of adult abandon.

Then it had to be Richard who held back.

In a world where morals were too often at a discount, he did not doubt his ability to have made the child his mistress; had he wished. It was not a question of placing Charlotte above the drabs of old Drury in his estimation. To Richard Charke a woman was a means to a particular end: neither more, nor less. But this time he had plans—ambitions. They would be served best by prudence. The greatest mistake would be to antagonise Mr. Cibber. The latter must be an ally, not an enemy. Doting as he did on this, his youngest daughter, he was not likely to baulk her happiness. (Not once he was assured that it *was* for her happiness.) Indeed, Mr. Cibber seemed very much in sympathy with the young lovers. Richard's greatest worry was that the astute Colley might suggest that Charlotte took "a small tour into the country", under "the guardianship of some sensible trusty person". Since Charlotte professed herself then to be "too indolent a disposition to let anything long disturb" her, such a plan could prove a disaster for Richard. "Absence, and an easy life" might cause her to forget him.

Richard bethought him of the lyric of "Poor Robin's Maggot", a song from *The Generous Freemason*, which he had heard played at Bartholomew Fair.

*"When you court a young virgin of sixteen years,  
You may banish your sorrows, your griefs and cares."*

Could he—with certainty? Was their King Coll as merry an old soul as the King Cole of tradition?

Richard's immediate fears proved without point. Colley was well disposed to consider his daughter's marriage to the

musician. Mindful, however, of by-gone impetuosity, Colley wished the "acquaintance" to be given full chance of development before so serious a step as matrimony be undertaken.

Had he himself been more disposed to wait—perhaps——

"You are children, both of you!" Colley told them, with indulgence. By rights they should be "sent to school" rather "than to church".

"How long, Father, must we wait?" she asked, filled with all-too natural impatience. (Ah! There was Cibber in every line of the lass, thought Colley, forgetful of the Shore side of his daughter's heritage.)

"If, when you have known each other a full six months, you are still of the same mind——"

"I am obliged to you, sir, for your favourable consideration of my suit." Over-anxious to please, Richard was unexpectedly pompous.

"Dear, dear, Father!" and she flung both arms round Colley's neck in an ecstasy of daughterly devotion.

## II

And in six months, almost to a day, Charlotte and Richard were married at St. Martin's Church. Seldom had a match appeared to augur as happily for the future. Colley, full of benevolence, was disposed to do all he could to help his son-in-law.

"I am your friend, Richard," he kept repeating the statement, as he wrung the young bridegroom's hand in congratulation.

Colley would endeavour, he hinted, to make Richard Charke known "amongst people of quality and fashion". Who was better able to do this, than wily King Coll? Of Charke's merit as a musician there could be no doubt. Of other doubts, alas, there were soon to be in plenty. But, at St. Martin's Church, everyone still was sanguine about the match.

"Egad, that is a charming daughter you have there, Cibber."

"I wish my Amelia's husband were half as handsome as Mr. Charke."

These and similar comments were tossed as gay conversational bagatelles amongst the guests. Charlotte was so radiantly happy that she approached beauty. Richard, a trifle nervous of all the influential Cibber friends clustering around him, tried to throw out his chest in self-confidence. He could

have wished his head ached less from those functions which preceded his farewell to bachelor status.

"Why, Dick, you old dog!"

Richard, in distaste, found his new brother-in-law, Theophilus, leering slyly at his elbow.

"I have heard tell that you——"

Demme! Must the fellow stand there guffawing and making double-meant remarks in that piping treble so like the voice of the father, but devoid of all its harmonies?

Richard had no wish to be tarred with the same brush of reputation as Theophilus. It might have been said that—allowing for the differences in age—the one was almost as great a blackguard as the other. Yet that was not quite the case. Richard had lived a gay enough life in all conscience, but he had not so far achieved notoriety of the sort that Theophilus increasingly enjoyed.

Why, when still a Winchester schoolboy the latter had watched prize fighting in London's bear garden. He was supposed to owe money at most of the bawdy houses in Covent Garden's Piazza. Rumour further had it that he was visiting one of these lovelies the very night that his (first) wife, Jane Cibber, was giving birth to their daughter, Jenny.

For such a man no words were too harsh.

Not disguising this instinctive antipathy, Richard turned aside. Immune to slights, Theophilus merely gave that squeaky laugh of his and sought other company.

There it was; on a February day in London, with scarcely a pale semblance of sun to shine upon the bride. Yet to this Charlotte was the most oblivious. She wanted only that the tedious conviviality might stop. That the age-old jokes and innuendos be silenced. That the men might cease their quaffing and the ladies their tattle. All she wanted was to be alone with Richard, her husband.

### III

Charlotte faced the disillusion of her marriage with that superb sense of courage she brought to this, the first and most testing of all life's reverses.

Only a short while earlier she had exclaimed, with shining eyes: "The measure of my happiness is full, and of an ever-enduring nature."

How soon she found herself "deceived in that fond conceit".

Probably few couples had approached marriage with less realization of its many obligations than the Charkes. What had either of them known of life, as it had to be lived together? Charlotte's own upbringing and education had been individual, in its way. Yet, for all its freedom, lacking in worldly experience.

"I knew so much about the stars; I knew so little about man."

She had not yet come close to the mildest forms of poverty. The life of the Cibbers lay in pleasant ways, for all Colley's gambling. There were servants, equipages, spacious houses. With Richard there was, in comparison, nothing, and love in the proverbial garret proved often ill-seeming. Charlotte had not known that she possessed such a nose for smells, such a sensitivity to squalor. She could not, would not let it become part of herself.

Richard, less particular, derided her for the way in which she would strip and wash down the whole of her body. Perhaps he wished the sight of her youthful endeavour could move him more. When money became short, as it quickly did, he impudently expected her to go to Colley.

"He *is* your father."

Charlotte had supposed a husband's place was to support his wife. Her father had been generous and Richard played frequently at the Lane.

"Why, then, have we so little money?"

His aggravating smile suggested things she preferred not to guess, certainly such money as came their way slipped smoothly through those well-shaped hands of the violinist. If she chid him with extravagance, he had the retort discourteous ready.

"Are *you* such a one for husbanding *your* wealth?"

In honesty she could not proclaim greater thrift for herself. Only one cheering reflection remained to her. That it gave her "an air of more consequence to be called mistress Charke than Miss Charlotte". Though Richard denied much, he never found it other than "a feather" in his "cap, to be Mr. Cibber's son-in-law".

"Then why," Charlotte cried, "do you play your cards so ill?"

As yet she had not learned the full duplicity of human nature. If she thought her husband's passion to be less, she was inclined to imagine a fault in herself to be the reason.



"Do you no longer love me as you did, when first we married?"

To questions of that kind, he had but one response: the rough love-making to which she was now accustomed from him.

Because Charlotte had a brain, as well as a woman's feelings, she pondered upon these casual displays of uxoriousness. Could they belong to marriage, as envisaged by the church? Was there indeed to be no tenderness and respect? No gentleness and consideration, one for the other?

Gradually she recognised that since Richard was attractive to her, he could not be without appeal to other women. To be jealous did not occur to her. It was only in time that she discovered how promiscuously he shared his favours between his wife and the rapacious ladies of the Piazza houses.

Looking back, she was amazed at her own absence of suspicion. How could she have been such a complete gull? It was not as if Richard took elaborate pains to hide his side-steppings from her. Truth to tell he cared little enough whether or not she knew. With the right sort of encouragement, he was capable of boasting about his conduct.

For a long while she had tried—not to believe. But it was impossible to walk in eternal ignorance.

It was the night of his benefit at the Lane that she had seen him—exactly as he was. He straddled a chair, his face pale and moist from drinking.

"Pretty Miss Innocent! Are you as green as you wish me to believe?"

Had Charlotte never heard tell of "the Hundreds of Drury"? Did she imagine that a raw, inexperienced girl was as amusing a bed-fellow as those women who made love their profession?

"It would seem that I have shocked you!" and he laughed his contempt of her supposed prudery.

In those days she still had been capable of being shocked. There was, so to speak, a nicety of distinction between suspecting something and having its taunting justification flung at her in reproach.

Soon she reached a state of indifference: "strongly attended with contempt".

In the beginning it mattered both to Charlotte's pride and self-respect to have him back. Little though she liked the task, she went in search of Richard: and the quest took her to many evil places and involved her in many humiliating situations. Yet she was quite without defeat.

"From morn to eve I have to trace you . . . to my fresh sorrow."

"Why not leave me be? What good does it do either of us?"

"You are my spouse."

"Does your inestimable sister-in-law, Jane, hunt her fox with like industry?"

The case of Theophilus was different. In some ways he was beyond moral redemption. Yet Charlotte loved him. He was her brother. The one member of the family who never wholly turned from her in all the years. She loved Theophilus but she no longer loved Richard.

She faced that stark fact calmly; with scarcely any suffering left. At first the degradation of knowing of his misconduct had been almost worse than the deed itself. Now she knew that to Richard, she was just another woman. There was no sacredness for him in the status of a wife.

"Nothing but the age of Methuselah could have made the least alteration in your disposition, Richard."

The words were spoken in a despair too profound even to permit of tears.

The first twelve months of life as Mistress Charke were not confined to the chasings and the promises made and broken. They saw also the beginnings of a stage career which, in its way, happened rather than was sought. It might have been that Mrs. Thurmond was the unconscious instigator.

"Understanding" that Charlotte was to be an actress, the older woman suggested that a professional start might be made as "Mademoiselle" in *The Provok'd Wife*; at Mrs. Thurmond's own benefit.

Charlotte being adaptable and anxious to earn a little money on her own account, agreed. It was not as if Richard had objections. If anything, he was pleased. The money would help and Charlotte would have less time to pursue inquiries into her husband's matrimonial misrule.

Both Colley and Mrs. Oldfield inclined to exaggerate Charlotte's ability. In later life Charlotte knew those early claims to "a genius for the stage" to have been excessive and boosted on her part.

"The success I met with was rather owing to indulgent audiences that good-naturedly encouraged a young creature, who, they thought, might one day come to something."

Even if she had not precisely set out to be an actress, she admitted an "extacy of heart" on seeing the name of the char-

acter she was to play set down on the bills of the benefit for Mrs. Thurmond.

A joy, "somewhat dashed", alas, by finding an insertion to the effect that the part of "Mademoiselle" was being played "by a young gentlewoman, who had never appear'd on any stage before."

It would seem that the prudent Colley was not advertising family genius until it had been proved!

Dashed—yet not daunted—Charlotte hired a coach and made a round of acquaintances, assuring them that she, and no other person, was "the gentlewoman" billed!

"Such extravagant conceit!" Richard told her, humorously.

She was aware that he must be finding it a change to have something, however tiny, to hold up in criticism of herself.

"Would you have my début pass unrecognised?"

Smiling, he suggested that the coach hire would use up almost all of the money she would be making.

There was no doubt that Charlotte brought sparkle to the French part, with its curious accent, as had been considered proper in its earlier day:

*"When one Frense Laty have got hundred lover—  
Den she do all she can—to get hundred more."*

Six weeks later the same play was selected for the benefit which Richard was sharing with Kitty Clive. This time Charlotte's name was in capital letters. The opening lines of the play struck a note of self-sympathy in Richard. With what relish the "Sir John Brute" of the evening flung his lines at the audience:

"What cloying meat is love—when matrimony's the sauce to it."

The occasion was quite a family affair, since Jane Cibber took over "Lady Fanciful" owing to the indisposition of Mrs. Horton, who should have played it.

As Charlotte and Jane stood in the wings, awaiting their joint entrance in the Dressing Room Scene of Act I, Charlotte, in genuine amazement, perceived that her sister-in-law was suffering from stage-fright. With Charlotte, to notice was to comment. She found it strange that the experienced Jane should be thus affected when Charlotte, whose second appearance it was, "had no concern at all".

"That's the very reason," came the gentle reply. "When you

have stood as many shocks as others have done, and are more acquainted with your business, you'll possibly be more susceptible of fear."

Such grave reproof was too much for the hot-headed Charlotte. She turned on her heel, breaking off the conversation and declined to speak to Jane—except on the stage—for the rest of the evening. Later, the two girls laughed together over the incident and the time certainly was to arrive when Charlotte appreciated the sensibility of that advice.

Her next part came about through an over-turned chaise at Highwood-Hill. Mrs. Porter, the luckless occupant, dislocated a limb in the accident and was unable to appear.

Then during the summer, Theophilus directed what was known as "the young company". What more natural than that his sister should be one of its members? With these players she had the chance to create "Lucy" at the *première* of *George Barnwell*. Her salary had risen "from twenty to thirty shillings a week."

"I begin to make acting my business as well as my pleasure."

It was during this material success that she re-lit a small candle of hope that her marriage still might be capable of salvation.

She knew that she was to have a child.

Surely that might make a difference? Perhaps awake in Richard some sense of decency and responsibility?

"If only——" Charlotte whispered, afraid to speak the words aloud.

## CHAPTER 4

### MOTHER AND DRAMATIST

*Since 'tis the Intent and Business of the Stage,  
To Coppy out the Follies of the Age;  
To hold to every Man a Faithful Glass,  
And shew him of what Species he's an Ass.*

*Prologue to  
THE PROVOK'D WIFE,  
play by John Vanbrugh*

#### I

Charlotte accepted the process of motherhood in the manner of any normal, healthy young woman, allowing it to inconvenience her as little as she could. She was happy to be having a child, at least conceived in love, however lukewarm her own feelings towards Richard had since become. She intended to devote herself to her baby; to expect any change in her spouse was hopeless.

Yet the months of pregnancy were by no means sad ones for Charlotte, inadequate though Richard's affectionate and moral support might be.

"Have you so little pleasure in the thought of our child?" she asked her husband, with strange patience: as if at this late date she sought a better understanding of him.

"It was of no one's seeking," came the reply—ungracious as she should have expected.

For the sake of the baby she was carrying, she forced herself to maintain a calmness of demeanour.

"What manner of man are you? An unnatural monster?"

He spread his hands in a gesture, not bothering to answer. To have done so would have required more effort than he was prepared to devote to Charlotte. Only until the child was born did she intend to bear with his indifference and his insults. After that, the devil could take him, for all she cared.

Charlotte had intense pride, but the effort to pretend the success of her marriage to her relatives was not easy. Her mother gladly would have accepted the confidences of a daughter. Indeed Mrs. Cibber tried the indirect approach. "Was not Mr. Charke often away from his home? Charlotte,



in a kind of grim stoicism, maintained that all was well between them.

Colley, much occupied with the theatre, had little time to spare for his daughter. He lent her the occasional guinea but his warmth was slightly diminished. It seemed as if already the first cracks in their relationship had begun to appear. As yet they were but of a hair's thickness, but soon they would have widened into fissures. Her own good health and the mode of the day enabled her to continue her work at the theatre right up until it was close to the time when she was due to be brought to bed. She was selected from the members of Theophilus's company to become "stock-reader to the theatre, in case of disasters".

The first occasion she was called upon in this capacity was for the benefit of Mr. Worsdale when Charlotte played before the Prince of Wales. Shortly after that Mrs. Heron bruised her "knee-pan".

Charlotte had become acquainted with the feel of stage-fright. This night it was real—intense—difficult to bear. Recalling how she had mocked her sister-in-law, she said, when next they met:

"I don't conceive I could have suffered much greater agony . . . I absolutely had not a joint or nerve I could command, for the whole night."

"And Mr. Quin the 'Ventidius'," Jane observed, smiling.

Charlotte felt as bad—or worse—when she had to take Mrs. Butler's place as "Elizabeth" in the play, *Essex*. Mrs. Butler sent two guineas to Charlotte next day, out of gratitude for having understudied at such short notice. Charlotte, "but a babby in the business", was touched by this gesture from an established artist.

## II

Charlotte gave birth to a daughter under the make-shift conditions of those times. From the moment that she held the mite of humanity to her breast, she knew that henceforward life was to have a mission. She would cherish this child.

"I will make our infant my care. No neglect on her father's part shall render me other than fond of her."

Indeed as Charlotte saw it, the baby made amends for the whole hopeless failure of the marriage.

"There is little of Mr. Charke about her," Jane Cibber said,

sitting with Charlotte some days after Colley's new grandchild was born. "Do not think that I wish to pry into your affairs, dear Charlotte—but——"

The young mother bent over the babe with the tenderest of smiles. All she had suffered was as nothing compared to this reward.

"Why do you remain with him?" Jane asked.

"That I shall not do longer. We are in the same circumstances, in regard to each other that 'Mr. Sullen' and his wife were."

"So you have agreed to part?"

"'Is there on Earth a thing we could agree in?'" Charlotte quoted wryly from *The Beaux' Stratagem*, in which play the "Süllens" had their dramatic existence.

Richard was more than agreeable to any arrangement that would give greater freedom to himself and at the same time preserve a valued link whereby he could obtain money, when he required.

Therefore Charlotte's marriage entered upon a strange new phase in which there was neither pain nor repining. When Richard "thought proper", he visited his wife and daughter. Charlotte received him without any animosity.

"Why, you show to me the same good nature and civility that you might an old, decayed acquaintance."

"What would you have me do? Berate you for the past? Since we are no longer lovers, at least we may behave in a genteel manner when we happen to be together."

"Nothing could please me better, my dear." Richard seated himself and she brought the child for him to see. "More Cibber than Charke, I observe. I dare say that pleases you mightily."

"I do not find the fact disagreeable."

Charlotte, who despised pretence, asked what favour Richard had come to beg? Since it was unlikely that he wished to make love to her, she could only assume he was in quest of money.

"I seldom have the honour of your company but when cash runs low."

"How well you know me," he answered, with a graceless grin that she could not find it in her to resent.

"Do I not constantly supply your wants?" With only the lightest irony in her voice, she asked what sum he wished to borrow.

Could she manage a guinea? Mr. Cibber was not ungenerous to his daughter, when approached in the right manner.

"Many an auxiliary guinea I have pleaded from my father. For what purpose, shall you use it? In such a fashion that I might purchase myself a new pair of horns?"

Even this remark he did not take amiss. When she had given him a drink of whatever she could find, she handed over one of the three pounds she made in salary at "the New Theatre in the Hay-Market". Theophilus had led a revolt against the management under Highmore and set up in opposition.

### III

Some little time later Charlotte was involved in "a dispute" about parts with Mr. Fletewood, her new manager. By taking "a French leave of him" she believed herself to have behaved in a "meritorious" manner.

"I cannot say, in the affair, he used me entirely well, because he broke his word with me."

Fire-brand Theophilus entirely agreed as to the rightness of what his sister had done. "The spark of fire between Mr. Fletewood" and herself was blown into "a barbarous blaze". The result was, she was tempted into writing "a farce on the occasion", which she called *The Art of Management*. She was careful to show Fletewood in as ridiculous a light as possible. Notwithstanding her "impertinent and stupid revenge", the manager restored her to her position in his theatre. This gesture was at the earnest request of Colley himself—a man of sufficient importance for Fletewood to consider.

"I admit the wench erred," Colley said, with all frankness. "She uttered some truths which—ought rather to have been concealed."

In spite of Colley's intervention on her behalf, Charlotte did not remain long with Fletewood. She joined, instead, Henry Fielding, who had then taken on management of "The Hay". Fielding, who also had a profound respect for old Colley, was sorry for Charlotte. Knowing her left with a child to support—it was common gossip that Richard Charke contributed nothing to the upkeep of his family—the Irish dramatist was anxious to do what he could to help. He persuaded Richard Yates to relinquish the part of "Lord Place" for the eleventh performance of Fielding's own play, *Pasquin*. "You have other parts in the piece, Yates, and I would

esteem it a personal favour to spare this one in order that Mrs. Charke may act."

To Charlotte, Fielding said: "I engage you, Madam, at four guineas per week." Moreover he arranged for her to have a benefit. She was sixty pounds the better off for this and carried her purse around with her until her "stock was exhausted". She was determined to keep a reminder by her not to squander a sum that "might have made many a decayed family truly happy".

*Pasquin* was succeeded by a tragedy from Mr. Little, who had given the stage such success with *George Barnwell*. In *The Fatal Curiosity* Charlotte appeared as "Agnes", aged wife of "Wilmot", (acted by John Roberts).

At this period, she boarded with her sister at lodgings "in Oxendon-Street", where both were inmates. Charlotte's child was, of course, with them. People were inclined to fob off on to Charlotte what others of a more discerning nature would spurn. She was put into "the worst apartment" and remained blissfully "insensible of its oddity" until one "blustering night".

Having surveyed the surroundings with thoroughness for the very first time, she took up her quill and proceeded to amuse herself by describing the room and making "an exact inventory" of her "chattels".

Her windows, she saw, as reaching "from pole to pole". What matter whether they were the new casement variety or the old lead-patterned ones opening out to the night's cold air? There was little to choose in the matter of draughts. So airy were the windows, in fact, that there must have been holes in them. The chest of drawers she conceived as being of the size of "a trough, where pigeons drink". She wrote on:

*"A handkerchief and caps as much as they'll contain;  
O! but I keep no gowns—so need not to complain."*

For fire "an inch of stove"; "two foreign screens . . . in lieu of tongs and poker." She slapped a hand against her thigh. "Nay, faith, shovel, too!" She used one of the screens to fan the fire, when she had such a luxury. For poker, she pressed into service an "iron skewer".

She contemplated next the bed, on which her child slumbered and for company's sake addressed the sleeping youngster: "Now for my lovely bed, of verdant hue." Laughing, she

whispered: "If new it ever were, 'twas when Adam was a boy! . . . so charming thin, the darns so neat."

Of chairs there was but one: and rickety at that.

There came a tap upon the door and Brett entered the cheerless "airy mansion".

"See, I have turned poet as well as dramatist!" cried Charlotte, thrusting the lines written into the other's hand, never thinking that a "foolish, fond sister" would preserve them for nineteen years.

"We Cibbers do not dwell in fortune, do we?" was Brett's comment. (She herself was going through a period of struggle.)

Charlotte slipped an arm round the other's waist. She loved Brett best of her sisters.

"I wish I could assuage those sorrows and inconveniences of life which you labour under, dear Brett. I'll help you, in as much as it lies within my little power."

The other's face, with its characteristics of Colley and Theophilus blended, stirred to sympathy. "When fortune makes it possible, you shall enjoy my bounty."

"At least you have more reason and good sense than I," Charlotte willingly conceded.

Brett sat on the bed, which was considerably better support than the chair, and the two sisters began to discuss the immediate future.

Charlotte felt the stirrings of that restlessness which was to be at once her salvation and her curse. She was already tired of the life of the theatre. It was too impermanent, too dependent upon the attendance of audiences: the takings at those benefit performances which must compensate for the low level of salaries. What was there to it all in the end? One learned a part—played it for a few performances at most—then as like as not remained idle until the misfortune of another gave renewed opportunity.

"I have had enough of being a stock-reader—being called upon to play any part, whether it suit me well or ill!"

Brett looked up inquiringly.

"What of your plays, Charlotte?"

After *The Art of Management*; or *Tragedy Expell'd*, which was performed at York Buildings in the September of 1735, she had provided another that same month for Lincoln's Inn Fields—*The Carnival*; or *Harlequin Blunderer*.

"Two dramatic pieces is no mean achievement by twenty—that is your present age, is it not?"



Charlotte did not appear to be listening. She was trying to consider the past two decades of her life, and to seek some pattern—some purpose in the years of unreason.

A wild, tomboy's youth had been followed by marriage to the very first man to catch her fancy; a salutary experience, which had made her more wary of future entanglements. She had gone into the theatre, largely at her father's behest. While she did not deny herself a certain natural bent for acting, she could not call her appearances to date the kind calculated to startle London.

Even that steady, pedestrian passage of progress had been interrupted by childbirth. The outcome was years of undeniable responsibility ahead. She had to provide for that child, since Richard did not: and Colley's moments of generosity were not to be relied upon for regularity.

"Though I would not, for a moment, be without my poor child——"

"I confess I find it difficult to think of you as a mother, Charlotte. And a good one, at that."

"I do not mind hardships and rebuffs. Nor do I worry, if my bed be hard as the one you sit upon this instant. But I wish something better for Kitty."

Brett looked inquiringly at her sister. So it was true: what had so long been suspected.

"Between you and Richard Charke all is——"

"—done with! Rarely does he come to visit us. And if he does, it is to borrow money from me."

"What had you in mind to do, dear?"

"To dive into trade."

This startled Brett. Society had its codes: certain things were permissible: others were not. The daughter of an actor might take to the stage. That was to be expected. A young woman, unhappy in her marriage, might venture to live apart from her husband. When there was also a child to support, necessity for employment was conceded. But—above all that employment must be genteel. Trade could hardly be called so.

Therefore Brett did not attempt to hide her honest misgivings. Indeed, she felt bound to remonstrate. Had Charlotte quite forgotten the members of her own family? Was it to be imagined that it would be acceptable for any daughter of Colley Cibber to serve in a shop?

"I did not say serve in someone else's shop, dear Brett. I intend to take one of my own."

"In what manner is that better?" The other's agitation increased. "Already father has begun to be displeased with you. Oh, I know he did not oppose the marriage and should not blame you that it went wrong . . . would you alienate him still further by your conduct!"

Charlotte felt the chance must be taken and repeated her intentions.

"What—sort of—a shop?" Brett's voice was quite faint with dread anticipation.

"I shall become an oil-woman and grocer."

## CHAPTER 5

### EXCURSION INTO TRADE

*"In short, gentlemen, when I engaged in this business, I determined to carry it on with such spirit, as would either make my fortune, or entirely ruin me in a little time."*

THE ADVENTURES OF COUNT FERDINAND FATHOM  
by Tobias Smolett

#### I

From the time that Charlotte left Oxendon Street to enter trade, her relationship with her sister, Brett, became spasmodic in character. The good lady married twice. On the second occasion, to one Joseph Marples, who did his honest best as "faithful partner of her sorrows". Together they ran Lodgings, where an "elegant meal" might be taken. Brett became "a humorous, good-natured, elderly landlady" whose establishment acquired a certain note.

#### II

Charlotte procured her shop and there was accommodation—of a kind—for herself and her small daughter, Kitty. Charlotte brought the usual immense enthusiasm to the new project, singing as she scoured and making featherweight lightness of the drawbacks. The child, thin, grave-eyed, watched in silence. At times Charlotte was concerned about Kitty. The rag-tail, uncertain sort of life was not the one she had intended for the child she so sincerely loved. Charlotte suspected that Kitty was doomed to grow old and wordly wise beyond her years.

"Why did we leave Auntie Brett?" Kitty asked, in her infinitely clear voice. A bell-like voice, that her grandfather would appreciate as being of future possibility for his tuition in stage declamation.

Charlotte, impulsive and erratic though she might be, had wonderful patience with her child. The task in hand was halted, whilst the gaunt mother sat cross-legged on the dusty floor, with Kitty on her lap.

"We are to live here now, darling," Charlotte explained; if it were an explanation.

It smote her heart to see the way Kitty accepted this, as she was to accept so much discomfort and vagrancy in the years ahead of them.

Charlotte, almost immediately cheerful again, found some small errand calculated to keep the child amused.

Once the shop was ready to be opened, the owner besought customers. Dressing herself and Kitty in their unquestionably shabby "best", Charlotte proceeded to make known this departure from Cibber convention. Her acquaintances, who were numerous, came out of curiosity to see what Mistress Charke could make of selling oil and groceries.

Just as Charlotte had played the rôle of dispensing physician to its full dramatic value in adolescence, so she now adopted this new impersonation. On leaving the shop, one of the more influential Cibber friends turned to her male escort:

"La! What a conceited air of trade she carries!"

"I confess it amused me mightily, the way she talked of herself and other dealers."

"The rise and fall of sugars."

"Trading abroad and at home."

With guffaws of quality, the visitors trod carefully over the garbage as they crossed the street from the shop, still discussing the owner's absurdities.

Charlotte, aproned in her doorway, hailed the scruffy news-vendor and demanded a paper. This she carried to the counter, behind which Kitty sat, quiet and obedient. A kind of gnawing pang, deep in the stomach, reminded Charlotte that it was time she prepared a meal. Kitty was left to guard the shop and summon her parent if any customers should arrive.

As Charlotte ate, so she studied the paper "to see how matters went at Bear-Key". She made it her business to be familiar with the arrival of ships and their losses at sea; who, in the grocery-trade, had become "broke" and which dealers "advertised teas at the lowest prices". She made adverse comments on those who under-sold their wares.

"They will ne'er be quiet 'till they render the article of tea a mere drug . . . I, and many more of the business shall be obliged to give it up."

Charlotte's stocks of any commodity were meagre: "ten or a dozen pounds at a time of each sort." Not that she allowed this parsimony—the result of credit difficulties—to dishearten

her. As she sold so she replaced, which hardly allowed for any profit to herself!

She rarely stocked more than a gallon of oil, but when closed for the night, she would draw stock to table, dip her quill into the inkwell and to the illumination of one, flickering candle, write to "Country Chapmen", inviting them to deal with her.

Charlotte decided that "for the first year"—until she succeeded in establishing "a universal trade"—she would dispense with "an out-rider" for country custom.

"I am a very good horse-woman and will go the journeys myself."

With a self-satisfied nod, she added—to an invisible audience or the sleeping Kitty—that the money thus saved was as well in Charlotte's own pocket. "Providentially," no doubt, such meagre trading as there was, happened to be of a local nature. Charlotte's generosity and wish to abide by the conventions of her present calling, did not make for prosperity.

One day a friend came in quest of "a Quarter of a hundred of lump-sugar". The order was not one of necessity, so much as a genuine wish to bestow patronage.

"A Quarter of a hundred?" Charlotte repeated, obviously pleased. It was the usual procedure to add "a tret of six pounds extra" to such a sizeable order. But Charlotte, confused by success, proceeded to weigh out the larger allowance as given in the sugar-bakery business.

"Are you sure that is right, Charlotte? Half of what you gain in the hundred would seem to be excessive——"

"'Tis our way," Charlotte observed, grandly, "to make an allowance over and above the common weight."

"You may rely upon me to bring you all the custom that I can. Now, perhaps your assistant could carry the sugar to my carriage?"

There being no boy for such errands, Charlotte—to her friend's obvious concern—carried out the sugar in person.

With the likelihood of trade expansion in mind, Charlotte decided to go shopping. On the following morning with Kitty, alternately walking and skipping at her side, she traversed "Drury-lane, Holborn, Fleet-Ditch, etc.," in search firstly of a large beam and secondly scales to hang upon it. Finding no scales to her taste, she placed an order for a pair.

Back at the shop, the "woman who kept the house", bade Charlotte good-morning. Learning of the errand, the worthy



made so bold as to inquire whether the purchase be merited.

"I can give you proof of my knowledge of trade," Charlotte cried indignantly, and recounted the episode of the sugar. The woman doubled up with mirth. When she had recovered, Charlotte asked wherein lay the joke?

"Is it possible you do not see for yourself, Mrs. Charke?" And the laughter threatened to start all over again. "Why, you gave in overweight the allowance for a whole hundred—not a quarter of a hundred."

In spite of so salutary a lesson, Charlotte hung the shining new scales from the erected beam and left the brass weights in a handy pile on the counter-end nearest the door.

Purveyors of oil were accustomed to supplying the commodity for the purposes of lighting links, also those torches known as flambeaux. Demands were constant. Not every Londoner chose to hire a chair or carriage. To proceed through treacherous streets after candle time without a link-man was to invite trouble. So each evening at dusk, some sooty-faced youth would call for his "Handsel" of oil. Since Charlotte also sold liquor she would sometimes take note of the cold, pinched look and treat him to a dram.

"To keep out the cold."

"You are too kind to us, m'm."

One such youth drained his ration of spirit, prattling of Charlotte's kindness to himself and others of his profession. He bowed. She curtseyed. A pretty comedy of manners was carried to its conclusion as he backed from one end of the shop into the gloom of the street.

Some five minutes passed before Charlotte had occasion to make use of her beautiful scales. When she turned to pick up one of the weights, she found the pile no longer there. Every one of them had been stolen!

"The arch-villain!" she cried with vexation.

The filching youth took good care not to visit her shop again. She saw him but once more, as passenger "in a two-wheel'd coach from Newgate to Tyburn". Recognising her in the cluster of onlookers by her height, he had the grace to lower his head in shame.

### III

One of Charlotte's concerns, in becoming a shop-keeper, was how to save her effects from seizure by her husband. Though

they no longer lived together, so far as the law went, he had "a right to make bold with anything" that was hers. "No formal article of separation" existed between them.

Charlotte did not wish Richard's present mistress, (who lived no further away "than the house next to the coach-maker's, in Great Queen's Street") to profit accordingly. The, only protective course was handing over the receipts to another's custody. For this office of trust, she chose the "widow gentlewoman", who now boarded with her. Thus Richard Charke was able to touch neither the money nor the stock. They were no longer the property of his lawful wife.

With his "insatiate fondness" for those "common wretches, that were to be had for half a crown", why should he take from Charlotte the little she struggled to save?

"Not a month were we married before I found him out," she thought reminiscently. And, after the birth of Kitty, had he not been exactly the same as in the past?

It was almost certain that Richard must have been aware of the clever way in which Charlotte had protected herself against his legal rights. Yet he did not challenge her—doubtless because use he knew himself outwitted.

News shortly had it that Richard's "lady" had been arrested for a hundred pound debt, whilst the two of them dined together. He found the means of redeeming her through the good offices of some merchants. The firm was connected, as agent, to a gentleman of substance who was taking Richard with him to Jamaica. He left for that country without any farewell to his wife and child.

"I suppose Madam will follow him." Charlotte was discussing the matter with her boarder, long-since become confidante. "And pass in the Indies for his wife." She smiled without malice. "I give her leave, for all the good it may do her."

"You are well rid of such a husband."

"I doubt it not!"

"And your child, of so callous a father."

"She knows so little of him. Pr'aps 'tis as well," and Charlotte bowed her head a moment in silence.

The only person who ever experienced Richard's generosity was his mother. It was she who brought Charlotte news of his death, which occurred some twenty months after he had sailed from England.

Mrs. Charke, senior, combined, with ingenuity, the task of

hunting and running at one and the same time. She would visit the ménage he shared with his mistress. From there, call upon Charlotte, to relate "a history of the chat of the day".

The mother's sorrow at the death of her gifted son was as natural as it was deep. Charlotte could respect such grief, though she found herself strangely unable to share in its manifestations.

"He made me an assignment of twenty pounds a year, during his life," Mrs. Charke, senior, spoke with tears in her voice.

"Though he did not choose to be a husband or a father, he proved himself a son," Charlotte responded in a gentle tone, adding that she wished only peace to his remains. "I hope heaven has forgiven him, as I do from my soul."

When her mother-in-law had gone Charlotte sat alone, aware how much on the surface her grief lay, if it could be so called. Why, even Kitty, who had known him so little, cried more. No, it was not grief, so much as anxiety that troubled Charlotte. Even in death he had not attempted to make provision for his family.

"Not a thing, in case of accidents, for our support."

Had Richard even made a will? Charlotte doubted that he had. If it was any consolation, "his lady"—assuming she had followed him—would be left as penniless.

"No help can be expected from my mother-in-law."

By this time Charlotte was under her "father's displeasure", with little hope of redress. She realised now that Richard, more than any other person, had been responsible for the widening rift.

"He would explode my father behind his back, and condemn him to me, for the very things he had partly urged."

Charlotte would not have felt so completely cut off from help, had her mother been alive. Mrs. Cibber, in her great "tenderness", would have made both daughter and grandchild her especial care.

Charlotte, who had sat dry-eyed thinking of Richard, felt the tears collect and fall, though she believed she must have wept herself dry, when Mrs. Cibber had died almost three years earlier.

"I shall love her to the end of my days, even as she loved me till the end of hers."

For some time Charlotte had had "secret thoughts" of shutting up shop. The twin tragedies of over-weight and stolen weights had made it seem an obvious course. Yet she had altered her mind, reluctant, perhaps, to admit too early a defeat.

After a further three months of comparative failure, to conceal her "misfortunes and disgrace" seemed less important than incurring further losses.

"For I have to think of my poor child's future, as well as my own."

So, with a hundred pounds' worth of stock, all paid for, Charlotte ceased to be a shop-keeper in favour of becoming a puppeteer.

## CHAPTER 6

### PUPPETEER

*And thus, our audience, which did once resort  
To shining theatres to see our sport,  
Now find us tossed into a tennis-court.*

*Epilogue to  
LOVE FOR LOVE,  
William Congreve, at the opening of  
the New House*

#### I

"I have taken the place over the Tennis-Court, in James Street and would have you assist me to run a Puppet Theatre."

With a smile, Charlotte added that the premises carried a licence, the only place of the kind in England with "so advantageous a grant".

Yeates, the travelling showman of fair-grounds, who had built up a "medley of entertainments", which from time to time had included such diversions as automaton, conjuring, "a puppet play" and "a Posture Master", surveyed his visitor with reservation.

He saw a young woman of unusual height, with a comely face and erect bearing. Her voice he thought "exceeding pleasant" and there was something infectious about her eager expression. Her hands were graceful in their restless gestures. It was not a tranquil personality. Then Mr. Yeates was not tranquil himself.

Without being told, he knew her for one of old Colley Cibber's daughters and the Cibber name still meant much in the theatre. As Yeates recollected it, the young lady had married a ne'er-do-well musician who had deserted her. In age the showman took Charlotte for twenty-three or thereabouts. She had a strange mixture of dignity and impulse. Being himself an odd sort of person, he recognised in Mrs. Charke something of "a kindred spirit", as it were.

She on her part felt the same instinctive bond of individuality. As she wrote later, in one of her letters:

"Neither of us can ever be surprised or offended at what the other says or does."



His voice broke in upon her thoughts with abruptness:

"What manner of help would you have from me, m'm?"

There was mischief in her eyes as she replied:

"You know everything about puppets. Whereas I——"

Yeates smiled in turn. At least the wench was honest: a quality rare in her sex.

"I have heard my father speak of Martin Powell's Punch's Theatre in Covent Garden's little Piazza." She was not unaware of the fact that Yeates had trained under the son of that gentleman, "of merry memory".

"And you would have something of the same? A weekly repertory of plays——"

"With diverse turns in addition."

Yeates nodded. The theatre in the little Piazza had opened nightly at seven, to prices of two shillings and one shilling (with sixpence for the gallery) and provided some two and a half hours of wax-candle-light entertainment.

This had been no "glove-puppet booth" or *castello* but an ambitious affair with marionettes, of wood, "moved by wires". And protected by wires, too, since the customary network of fine wire was stretched across the proscenium opening.

*"Ingenious artifice—of sure decit,  
Since naked prospects would betray the cheat."*

"Ah well," Yeates thought, it was fortunate for the showmen that not all members of the audience were as observant as Mr. Joseph Addison.

"Would you mock the Italian opera, as Powell did?" Yeates inquired of Charlotte, after a pause.

"I think not."

"Legendary tales from ballads and chapbooks?"

Again she shook her head with quick emphasis. "I would seek greater novelty than that. For instance—take one of my father's plays and turn it into the theatre of puppets."

Her idea was to use Colley's Pastoral, *Damon and Phillida*, which she thought would lend itself to such treatment. Yeates frowned, having no wish to be even the indirect cause of offence to Mr. Cibber.

"Would that be—wise?" ventured the showman, searching for his snuff-box.

"I am not afraid of my father, Mr. Yeates. It seems that you are!"

"Say rather that I prefer not to offer cause for offence."

Finding herself following a line likely to cause Yeates to withhold his help rather than proffer it, she asked him to tell her more about Powell's theatre. Yeates mentioned the moving of scenery, contrived by a grooved stage, as in the human theatre of the day. How there had been "flying effects", and the manner in which "triumphal arches" and other set pieces could "rise up from below" and the back scenes be "divided in the middle" to reveal "further perspectives".

"And from above, could descend flying chariots."

These effects, handed down to posterity from the Court Masques of Inigo Jones, had been considered prettier in miniature.

"What manner of company is necessary?" Charlotte asked.

"Martin Powell spoke many of the characters—as I do myself. He wrote his own plays."

"As I shall do," she chuckled. "And speak the women's voices. Some of the men's too, for that matter." She dropped into deep accents, reciting at random a "length" from one of the plays in which she had appeared.

Musical accompaniment was as essential a part of any Puppet Theatre as the ability to produce Punch's squeak. This was done by a wooden tube, held in the mouth, and known as a *pivetta*.

"I would spare no expense to make the venture an artistic success," Charlotte informed her companion. "I have seen your large waxwork figures at the fair grounds. I would like mine the same. I have in mind to buy mezzotintos of eminent persons, from which you shall carve the faces of the puppets."

Thus in March 1738, with an outlay of close on five hundred pounds, Charlotte's grand Puppet Show was ready to open. The scenery and costumes were the most elegant to be imagined. With the "technical skill" of her partner, Yeates, and her own artistic vision, she bid fair to outdo even those successful ventures of Martin Powell himself.

The stage was built high, to give the best advantage to the figures. These were manipulated by the Italian method. Owing to the size of the puppets—some were four foot in height—the head wire had to run across the wheel of a pulley and end in a counter-weight.

Yeates did most of the manipulating from below, assisted by the small staff, which included Charlotte herself. For the most part, though, her share in the programme consisted in following the multi-coloured script, cued in red for female voices, tur-

quoise for the male and green for the comic characters. She declaimed many of the rôles herself, which imposed a severe strain on her vocal organs.

For the opening performance she had composed a special ode. Had she not played the poet in Oxendon Street days? The verses were set to "music by an eminent hand"—unspecified—and printed copies distributed "gratis" to patrons.

She opened her doors at the then fashionable hour of six of the clock.

Kitty, with her small, adept hands, was often pressed into operational service, a task which she enjoyed.

"I do not think grandpapa will like our doing his play the same night as he puts it on himself."

"Fi, child!" but Charlotte smiled at her daughter, "would you have me afear'd of him?"

"If I were grandpapa, I should not like——" The clear common-sense of Kitty was often disconcerting.

"Come, child, you must help us to make Punch and his wife dance."

Kitty grave and quiet, stepped into position beside Mr. Yeates, who, in the confined space, was smelling strongly of steak and onions. She bore this with her accustomed patience and good-humour. There were times when Charlotte herself was amazed by the child's capacity for non-complaint.

## II

One of the most successful presentations, given "some twenty performances", was Fielding's ballad opera (on Molière's play) *The Mock Doctor*. She had two other Fielding works in the repertory: one, a coarse burlesque of old-fashioned heroic drama—*The Covent Garden Tragedy*—the other, *The Old Debauchees*.

"The part of Father Giraud, a Jesuit, shall be played by Signor Punch from Italy," she decided, when drawing up the handbills. On the higher plain were Shakespeare's *Henry IV* and *VIII* and *Richard III*. To lighten these were *The Miller of Mansfield*, "sentimental drama" and *The Beggar's Wedding*. (This was inspired by *The Beggar's Opera*.)

"The audience will delight how we have modelled a puppet on Farinelli, the celebrated singer."

Charlotte provided, by way of a *divertissement*, "a grand dance by Mr. Punch in a full-bottom periwig."

"I ever had a passion for a periwig," confessed Charlotte, not without recollection of her childhood escapade.

This was after one of the performances, when the organisers were sitting down for a well-deserved rest. But not to idleness. She was cobbling a slit in a puppet's costume, Yeates repairing one of the wires attached to the corpulent body of "Mr. Punch" and Kitty, indulging in one of her rare outbreaks of laughter. She had heard the story of "Mama in the Ditch" before but that did not make it the less comical in repetition.

Charlotte, glancing at her daughter, asked herself whether Kitty could be called "a happy child". Her eyes set far back in her head, as if she were tired from the stuffy atmosphere, with its predominant odour of guttering candle-wax. Kitty was too thin by far and her little face over pale. She should play in the fields more and spend less time in Punch's Theatre. Planning mentally, Charlotte decided she could well manage "The Irish Trot by Punch's wife" herself.

"What do you say to Dryden's *Amphitryon*?" she asked Yeates, suddenly forgetting her child's paleness and concentrating upon future programmes.

"You do not think it a thought too literary?"

"The Puppet tradition of folk drama" was being ignored to some extent. Yeates was sure that this was what audiences at the Tennis Court really preferred. His wax-faced puppets, with their greater human resemblance, were in themselves a diversion. And he had to confess that her uses for Punch had wit. He appeared as "Falstaff", and again as "Mother Punch-bowl"—those were but two of his varied changes of character.

Charlotte, seeing her child stifling a yawn, bade Kitty "go put yourself to bed". (They resided at the Tennis Court during this period.) Yeates, completing his own work about the same time, wished Charlotte a civil good night. She was about to lock the theatre premises when she perceived a straggler from the audience. She would have dismissed the man with a quick word, but something in his manner and his bearing stayed her tongue.

"Mistress Charke? I have watched every performance at your theatre—each with more pleasure than the last."

"Our aim is to serve the public."

"In this you have succeeded in miraculous fashion."

Though his clothes proclaimed him the gentleman she was becoming impatient.

"May I remind you, sir, that the hour is late?"

He smiled and in that smile there was something of Richard Charke. A quality she should, by instinct, have mistrusted.

"I have not introduced myself. My name is Sacheverel."

"Perhaps—at an hour less late than this——"

"Then I may present myself again?"

Bowing he disappeared into the night.

He came back on many occasions while the short season lasted. Charlotte unwillingly, almost unsuspectingly it seemed, found herself being drawn once again into the sort of human relationship she had better have avoided.

Sacheverel spoke to her, as Richard had done. Eyes looked into hers with soft pleading. A voice cajoled, clouded by emotion. A hand, not altogether steady, explored for hers. Things she had believed dead in herself were stirred to renewed life.

"Dear God, I am still a woman."

He spoke of protection; of happiness; of providing for herself and a child he could not have loved more dearly were she indeed his own.

There were warning voices in Charlotte's brain. They told her she had made a grievous mistake the first time and disaster on the second occasion might prove as complete.

"Never was a more unfortunate devil than I," she cried, moved to rare tears by a man's wish to be kind to her.

"Nay, Charlotte, surely you exaggerate?"

That warm, kindly voice and the trick of looking at her with his soul in his eyes, threatened her undoing.

"Go away, please, please, go away."

"Would you banish me, when all I seek is our mutual happiness?"

Charlotte moved away from him and stood at the window of her room above the Tennis Court. Kitty, had gone on a message, so Charlotte was alone with a man she was afraid to trust and yet from whom she so desired rescue from life's drabness.

The fatigue, which became daily more noticeable, made her depressed and less well able to send Mr. Sacheverel about his business.

"Charlotte——"

Again that voice! He moved quietly across to where she was standing, her head bowed, the tumult in her heart making her feel a little giddy (or was it that she had forgotten to eat?)



He was behind her, taller than Richard; of bigger build.

"What is it you want with me?" she asked, between clenched teeth. Better give way to him, then perhaps he would go. Kitty would not be back for some time . . .

"To marry you," he said, with a kind of shocked surprise.

Charlotte threw back her head in the laughter of hysterical relief.

"Oh, la, and I thought your intentions were quite of another kind."

He drew her to him, not harshly and possessively, as Richard had done, but with—respect. A man's mouth covered her own, evoking a half-forgotten pleasure. Charlotte, her eyes closed, surrendered herself to the moment. With a return of caution, she freed herself from the embrace.

"I must think, Mr. Sacheverel."

"Will you not call me by my first name?"

She turned, a touch of humour still at the corners of her mouth. "If you would tell it me, my dear friend."

### III

"Mama, shall you marry Mr. Sacheverel?"

"I do not know, Kitty. I cannot make up my mind on that score."

"He seems a very nice gentleman," the child said, trying to be helpful. She had no reason to dislike Mr. Sacheverel. He brought her presents, chucked her under her chin and called her "my pretty", when the mirror told her indisputably that she was plain. Kitty did not remember her father with great clearness. He had come and gone in a shadowy way when she was small and, when she was not quite so small, ignored her through most of his visits. She knew, more by instinct than from what she had been told, that he had been unkind to her mother. When he came, it was only for money. Once he had that, he had gone again.

They did not see Grandmother Charke these days nor did they have many dealings with the Cibber relations. Uncle Theophilus or Auntie Brett might stop by at Punch's Theatre, but Grandpapa Cibber never came near them. He was angry with Mama. And poor Mama did not know why . . .

Kitty, with a philosophy much older than her years, thought it might be a good thing for her for Mama to marry again. Mr. Sacheverel would take care of them both. Mama would not

need to work so hard. She might have a carriage, as did those elegant ladies that patronised the miniature theatre.

Kitty used to watch them, without being seen. Aping to herself their exaggerated airs and the way they hung upon every word uttered by their over-dressed escorts.

Mr. Sacheverel was not of that type. He was worthy; quiet, courteous and kind. His habit of paying court to the manageress of the theatre did not pass uncommented upon by Yeates and his assistants. Amongst themselves they laid wagers as to when Mistress Charke should change her name again.

But before any plans could be set into motion or any irrevocable decisions taken, Charlotte was attacked by "a violent fever".

And so, by the middle of May, only eight weeks after the brave opening night of high hopes, Punch's Theatre was closed.

#### IV

Charlotte was devotedly nursed by her child and her friends, while Mr. Sacheverel never lost a day in inquiring after her progress back to health.

When a move could be made, Charlotte "took a house in Marsham Street, Westminster, and lived very privately for a little while".

During this period of quietness she married again in great secrecy. She had no wish to advertise abroad such possible folly as a second matrimonial failure. Few of her friends knew; and practically none of her family. She was content to live in retirement, resting for as little—or as long—as God should ordain . . .

Mr. Sacheverel was someone she never regretted, except in her more self-assertive moments, when she said that her second marriage had better have been "let alone". Then Charlotte was apt to sound most vehement when she had most to hide.

Though her time with him was not long, as man measured such things, she knew then both peace and tranquillity of the spirit. Two things unique in her vagabond life.

And while she rested in the quiet domesticity of Marsham Street, she cared no more what became of her puppets. She had lost the enthusiasm for such things. Money, as usual, was short. Mr. Sacheverel, so far from being a rich man, had little means with which to support them.

In the summer of 1739 she impetuously decided to take her "wooden troop" to Tunbridge Wells without any preliminary foray. Puppets were fashionable in such watering places; a fact that Lacon had not failed to find out, when establishing his successful venture there.

Charlotte conducted her tiny band of supporting players to Ashley's Great Room in Tunbridge Wells. Having put on "two or three of our tiniest comedies"—as she told Yeates, later—and *George Barnwell*. She played there only long enough for her own benefit. She then returned to London. What little money she had had at the start, was all but gone.

Lacking, therefore, the wherewithal for any future London season, she was willing enough to hire out her puppets to Yeates, who re-opened above the Tennis Court in December of the same year. Though his season lasted for more than three months, it did not in any way rival the former success of the venture. Of the ten plays produced, eight were new. He gave only one night's presentation of puppets, filling out the rest with his own "dexterity of hand", a pantomime of human cast and other novelties. His fairground experience, without Charlotte's co-operation was insufficient. Yeates failed to attract the fashionable theatregoers.

"I have had enough of my wooden troop," she said, wearied of the whole venture.

She sold figures and mountings, with "the Lord Chamberlain's licence and the use of her name" for the paltry sum of "twenty guineas". But not to Yeates. Had she done that, she might have fared better. Who could have told? Useless to remind herself that she had as good as given away what had taken almost five hundred pounds to acquire.

"I spared no cost to make them splendidly magnificent . . . Another proof of my discretion!"

"It is not like you to be so bitter," ventured her husband, as aware as she was that she had been "done".

"Bitter? How else would you have me be?"

Bitterness was the hardest thing to avoid, in the unhappy circumstances.

Truly, as she said, "There is none in the world more fit than myself to be laughed at."

No one was less inclined to laugh than Charlotte when, in the following year, Fawkes, Pinchbeck and Terwin, exhibited her "Celebrated Comedians"—"Formerly Mrs. Charke's from the theatre in the Haymarket"—at Bartholomew Fair.

## CHAPTER 7

### "POOR SIR CHARLES!"

*"It is," said he, "worth while to consider the Force of Dress; and how the Persons of one Age differ from those of another, merely by that only."*

SIR ROGER'S PORTRAIT GALLERY  
*by Sir Richard Steele*

#### I

Mr. Sacheverel had not wished it to be generally known that he had taken Charlotte as wife. Indeed, he went to strange, elaborate lengths to extract from her a promise to keep their alliance secret.

"If 'tis what you wish," she agreed, questioning but little this demand. Indeed, since her experiences with Richard, she had been agreeable enough to keeping this second marriage quiet. Whom did it concern except Mr. Sacheverel, herself and Kitty?

The "worthy gentleman", as Charlotte called him, was satisfied with her vow.

"Do you think it a strange request to have made of one I love, Charlotte?"

"Doubtless you have your reasons——"

Obliquely he had hinted at family estrangements. If it were thought that he could afford to keep a wife, "certain people" might assume that he had more money than was the case. There was, too, the small matter of a pending inheritance.

Charlotte was never one to cavil at little things. She was content with what he had offered. His name—albeit *sub rosa*—"extream fondness" for herself and affection for Kitty; and the means of support for them both. Charlotte saw in this second marriage "a happy change of circumstances".

Indeed, so it proved.

Mr. Sacheverel was older than herself and "the more sensible for that", as she told him. He was a man of genteel behaviour. His companionship proved of a steady, enduring nature. How happily she could dispense with the more mercurial relationship that had existed between Richard and herself. Mr. Sacheverel was constant and unchanging in his affectionate

attitude. She knew she was not sharing him "with half London". He did not alternately ignore and make love to her. Indeed, he treated her not as some chattel, but as an equal to himself.

Charlotte, looking back, remembered the first days as Mrs. Sacheverel. Her own tears, were not of unhappiness, but of relief.

"Why do you weep, Charlotte?"

"Because you are so kind."

He was sincerely moved by the words. Had Charke ill-treated her? Made thoughtless demands on his wife?

But Charlotte was still too proud to talk of Richard to his successor. Such things were best left alone. It was enough that she had this unexpected legal protector to care for her: to grant a little of the common courtesy and tenderness any woman desired.

She did not analyse her own feelings. If she had, it was possible she would have found gratitude to rank high. Love? Perhaps it was not so much that as "sincerest friendship". Yet, when he held her close to him, he could move her to response.

What precise employment Mr. Sacheverel followed was not certain. He "went abroad" at varied hours. Sometimes he would be away for a lengthy period. At others he might appear back almost before she "had time to miss" him, as she said in laughing tones.

Charlotte was not curious. Few women could have been less so. Mr. Sacheverel was a gentleman, a state of fortune that did not, of necessity, imply regular occupation.

Perhaps at no period in her restless life was she to experience greater calm and security. She could shut away the whole world; all the seeking, the searching, the struggling for achievement of a bare existence for herself and Kitty. Charlotte could be the woman that nature had intended for her. Go marketing and prepare the meals. Wash her husband's "small clothes" and peg them to an improvised line made of wire that had been used for puppets. She could sing as she swished the long brush across the wooden floors.

In the time they were together, Charlotte became softened in her manner. Her face rounded and she took more pains with her appearance.

"You have a fine figure," Mr. Sacheverel would tell her. "Scrawny as breast of mutton!"



"That is because you do not eat sufficient," and he would throw a gold coin into the air and instruct her to send Kitty to the market for a shoulder of veal.

"And mind you it does not cost a mite more than three shillings and sixpence," Charlotte called after the child, adding that Kitty must see the meat was not "blown up with a Quill"—an old custom among butchers wishing to make their meat "seem fat and fair".

Because it seemed as if nothing in Charlotte's life ever could remain permanent, harsh circumstances again intruded. She had been out to buy a "naked baby" (doll) from the turners' as a birthday surprise for Kitty. Anniversaries of the kind were apt to pass unrecognised, since Charlotte often lacked the necessary money for such expenditure.

She came back, well pleased with her bargaining, to find Mr. Sacheverel "in some kind of a fit". Though a doctor was fetched to him, the poor man lapsed into a state of unconsciousness.

"Is there nothing to be done?" Charlotte cried, anxiety sharpening her tone.

"Indeed, m'm, I am doing all that is possible."

Mr. Sacheverel never properly rallied again and, in a kind of sick dismay, Charlotte realised that the man, who had shown her nothing but kindness, was dead. In an extravagance of grief, she fell to her knees beside his bed—the position in which Kitty found her, the doll forgotten, on the floor some yards distant.

## II

Thus "by the unexpected stroke of death" Charlotte again found herself "deprived of every hope and means of a support".

"Shall I ever overcome this terrible shock of Fate?" she asked herself, not knowing where to turn for immediate assistance. Her sister Brett, the most likely person to help her, was enduring one of her times of acute financial instability. Theophilus never had any money and Charlotte's father had made it abundantly evident that, where she was concerned, he no longer recognised the ties of parenthood.

The financial position in which she was left by Mr. Sacheverel was chaotic. Writing of those sad days, she said in all frankness:

"I was left involved with debts I had no means of paying."

Not a very original situation! By selling a few things she managed to give her husband a funeral. Not, it had to be confessed, one that did justice to a gentleman, but it was all she could manage.

Only, in a moment of great depression, did she allow a wicked voice to whisper in her ears: was it possible that Mr. Sacheverel had thought she was possessed of money? Had the success of Punch's Theatre led him to anticipate financial stability on her side?

"Dear God, do not let me think so ill of him as that."

The stock of her own clothes had become woefully short. The best she had sold to defray expenses. There was one dress, too shabby and threadbare; capable only of being cut down to fit Kitty. Some new buttons—"a farthing a pair" and it would serve.

Despondent, Charlotte went out to the market. Round her they were crying their wares. "New laid eggs, five a groat!"

"Hot mutton pies, hot!"

Mussells and mackrell, and live lobsters.

Charlotte passed on towards the fruit stall, where she was cajoled to try nonpareil apples at eight for the penny.

"Fresh green pease, nine pence a peck!"

She made her purchases sparingly, finding it hard to pass by the "roasted pig" and "Hot nice dumplings, hot!"

As Charlotte walked, so she saw the shop of a mantua-woman (dressmaker) only to be reminded sharply of her own inadequate wardrobe.

Back at her dwelling, she thoughtfully looked through the clothes that had belonged to the late Mr. Sacheverel. For sentimental and other reasons she had kept them. Now she spread them out on the bed. There was a "huge laced hat", as Fielding would describe it, large as "Pistol's" in Shakespeare's play. A "gold-laced waistcoat", that was more than handsome in style. A periwig, which only needed to be put "in the buckle"—that was to say, "crisped and curled". Coat, gloves and the rest: all from good mercers and drapers of the Strand.

"Strap my vitals!" Charlotte cried aloud, quoting "Lord Foppington", the part her father had made so famous. "I will see how ill they fit me."

Not entirely to her surprise, the garments became her well. She had been "en Cavalier" on the stage before now and her height aided the deception. She moved up and down the room,

soon adjusting her natural stride to the bigger-spaced steps taken by gentlemen. She was slim. The cut of the waistcoat adequately concealed a not-too-noticeable bosom. It was fortunate that her thighs were not thick. The skirt of the coat diminished the breadth that child-bearing had given to her hips.

"It will serve," she decided.

Kitty, who had lost a capacity for surprise, did not immediately comment upon her mother's attire. The child just stared at her in disconcerting silence.

"Well, do I make a convincing beau, child?"

"Have you gone back to the theatre, then, Mama?" Kitty asked, seeking a sensible explanation for the exhibition.

Charlotte shook her head.

"For some substantial reasons I have decided to go into men's clothes."

Kitty, with bowed head, accepted that, as she had accepted everything else.

### III

Having adopted male attire in emergency, as it were, Charlotte continued to affect it intermittently for the next twelve years or so of her life. In the haunts she frequented she became known, half jokingly, half affectionately, as "Sir Charles".

"'Tis as good name as any other," she thought, in no mind to care either way.

Miss Charlotte, Mistress Charke, the secret Mistress Sachverel, and now Sir Charles!

"One man in his time," she quoted with a wry smile.

Charlotte never vouchsafed a reason for going *en cavalier*. Let people think what they liked! Male attire had advantages. It enabled a woman to move unmolested and without suspicion through London's streets. The garb could be pressed into service as a disguise to creditors, or, more prosaically, spare the purchase of adequate garments of the variety worn by her own sex.

"At least I have a fine suit and hat," she commented, proudly, never dreaming that the very smartness of that hat was to lead her into further trouble. One day, when walking in Covent Garden, Charlotte was amazed to see an officer of the law advancing towards her. His intentions were all too obvious.

He was about to apprehend her for debt. The sum involved was the almost paltry one of seven pounds.

"As heaven shall judge me, I do not know where to raise as many pence."

The officer, who had her then in custody, was a man of compassion. He was too sorry for her to think what an oddly assorted pair they must have looked. He, a "very short, thick, red-faced man" with the potentialities of a "Falstaff" unpadding. Charlotte, tall, with her countenance disfigured by weeping, feminine, for all the brave play-acting as the man.

Learning who had caused this arrest, Charlotte roundly berated her as "a wicked drunken woman".

"I' faith I am half in agreement with you," the bailiff admitted. It was by dint of that "very handsome lac'd hat" that he had recognised her.

The woman who had informed on Charlotte to the present creditor, had led him to believe there was a fortune of "five hundred per annum" left "Sir Charles". As Charlotte knew only too well, it was neither probable nor possible. Owing to the bond of secrecy, she would rather allow it to be thought that she had been living with Mr. Sacheverel, instead of being in fact his lawful wife. In the present extremity the question of status was strangely unimportant.

And the bill for seven pounds? For the clothes that she was wearing at that moment!

"Was ever a mortal unhappy as I?" she exclaimed, the tears slipping down her face. Almost unthinkingly she had fallen into the shorter stride of a woman, the swagger forgotten in her distress. She asked whether this arrest meant the dread Marshalsea prison.

The bailiff eased her fears.

She was "set at large" until "matters could be accommodated" through the good offices of a Mrs. Elizabeth Carless, in whose company the bailiff left Charlotte.

Mrs. Carless, a well-known courtesan, numbered an attorney amongst her friends. Helpful in the emergency, he regretted that owing to his position, he was not able to go bail for Charlotte. However, he sent her instead to Mr. Mytton, mine host of the Cross-Keys.

The landlord had a good customer in the attorney and obeyed his request with the utmost willingness. Armed with one "Note of Indemnification", Charlotte sought a second bail. This she also obtained and went swiftly to the bailiff. While



he readily accepted Mr. Mytton's note, he shook his head with regard to the other sponsor.

"Why he stands in little better case than yourself! I have to keep close to him, lest he give me the slip."

One arrested already could hardly be bailed out by one who was likely to be arrested at any moment!

"I have here a writ," and the bailiff fumbled in the pocket of his coat, producing a well-thumbed and soiled document. "Already it has been renewed twice or thrice—to no purpose."

Charlotte, with a day and a half of liberty to hand, sought everywhere for "a second bail". Her shame was such, that she avoided her family. Only Theophilus, who unfortunately was not around at the time, would have appreciated the predicament. Brett had troubles enough of her own and from Colley, Charlotte could expect only rebuff.

In the end, there was nothing for it on the Friday, but to surrender and spend the night "in Jackson's Alley, at the officer's House". Charlotte had not been in the building more than half an hour, when there was a great commotion outside; a sustained knocking at the door, and a chorus of voices upraised.

"We have come to relieve poor Sir Charles."

There was a familiarity about the voices, all of them female. The bailiff had the door opened to the callers. Few stranger scenes can have occurred in his house. There, full of cheerful indignation, stood some twelve or fourteen coffee-house owners of the Covent Garden purlieus. Tall women, short women, fat and thin ones: all clammering to help the prisoner in misfortune. Charlotte, deeply touched by such loyalty, waited while the gallant amazons discussed ways and means with the bailiff.

"We offer you the extent of our finances," said the leader of the contingent.

Courteously, but with doubts, he watched them telling the money they had brought as a means of rescue.

"Nothing can be done without the debt and costs," the bailiff pointed out to them.

They offered notes—"jointly or separately."

Again he unwillingly refused.

"Watched as I am by the creditor——" and the sweating bailiff mopped furiously at his damp forehead.

All this discussion took the best part of two or three hours.



At the end of that time, the situation remained precisely the same. No—not quite that. Unhappy though Charlotte still was, she knew that she was no longer without friends.

"The hour is late, ladies." The leader rose; so did her companions. They wished the bailiff a polite good-bye and singly and severally clasped Charlotte's hands or kissed her cheek with sympathy.

"'Tis a monstrous injustice, if ever there was one. Ah, poor Sir Charles."

Charlotte was at last faced with no prospect except retirement to the dormitory. There she bewailed "the terrible scene of horror"; her "tortured view" of the place. The night passed in "bitterest reflections" upon her "melancholy situation".

Much greater than the sense of her personal distress, was the thought of what this was going to mean to Kitty.

"Her sole support is on her hapless, friendless mother."  
Friendless?

Even that appeared the case in the grim hours of approaching dawn. Forgotten were Mr. Mytton, the coffee-house keepers, with their purses bravely opened out upon the bailiff's table, even the officer himself, who had done what he could to make the position tenable.

The thought that nagged at Charlotte's conscience was that her child would have no idea where to find her.

About seven o'clock in the morning Charlotte was permitted to send a messenger to her lodgings. Kitty soon came to Jackson's Alley, tearful and afraid. She sobbed in the arms of her mother, that strange incongruous figure, in breeches and a white shirt. Kitty realised their plight almost more sensibly than Charlotte herself. Therefore it took some time before the latter could calm her.

"What have the poor and friendless to hope for?" Charlotte declaimed, only to be interrupted apologetically by Kitty.

"Is there nothing to be done, Mama?"

Somehow that quiet, thoughtful voice aroused both spirit and a sense of urgency in Charlotte.

"Tell them I need pen and paper!"

Kitty, not daring to eat or drink until she had carried out her mother's bidding, acted as bearer for the eight and thirty notes which Charlotte had scrawled in her round, educated hand. The same ladies who had visited Jackson's Alley the previous evening now returned reinforced by Mrs. Elizabeth Hughes.

"From myself—two guineas. One from Mrs. Douglas, in the piazza and a collection from the rest!"

In this manner, Charlotte's freedom was bought.

"Before you go home to your child, we are treating you to an elegant supper."

Charlotte reached for her hat. But the bailiff advised her to discard this in favour of his.

"Is it not the very mark by which you are unfortunately distinguished?"

"Yes, Sir Charles, that is all too true!" cried one of the coffee house keepers.

After hesitation, Charlotte handed over the handsome hat, receiving in its place one that was "cocked up in the coachman's stile, and weighted with a horrible quantity of crape" to keep the wearer secure against "the winter's cold". When Charlotte placed the hat upon her head, she was almost obliterated by it. A stale smell of smoke made her half choke.

The ladies indulged in side-aching laughter.

"I' faith, I never wore as big a hat since the ditch!" Charlotte told them, coming up for air before leaving Jackson's Alley.

After a merry meal, the ladies sent her home with a guinea in her pocket.

#### IV

Charlotte forthwith retired to what was, indeed, "a most dismal and solitary mansion in Great Queen Street". The building was so ancient that it threatened literally to fall about her.

During this period of hiding—for it amounted to that—she only went abroad on a Sunday. Then the streets would be clear of creditors and pursuing bailiffs. The unnatural life of begging from friends and stinting and making-do was better born by Charlotte than the child.

Kitty became ill and Theophilus "kindly sent an apothecary, at his own expense". Charlotte was more than grateful to her brother. A kindness which suggested that however bad things might become with herself, her relations would not "have abandoned an innocent and hapless child".

"How does she fare?" Theophilus asked, calling in person to inquire of his niece. (He had accepted Charlotte's garb without comment.) He could see that Kitty was far from well. She lay pale and restless on the bed.

"It does not go well with her."

"I would that I could do more for you."

"I shall be ever in your debt, dear Theophilus."

On the Sunday Charlotte was forced to go out "to prog" for herself and the child. The first visit was to an acquaintance.

"I have brought a pair of sleeve-buttons."

"They are indeed beautiful! What would you have me do with them?"

"Pledge them," Charlotte answered, without pride or preamble. She had been gone two hours at most. On returning to Great Queen Street she asked the landlady how Kitty had been.

"Miss went up, about an hour and half ago, to put on some clean linen."

As Kitty had not come down since, the landlady concluded that she was resting.

"She complained of being very sleepy before she went up."

When Charlotte reached the room, Kitty was "stretched on the floor, in strong convulsive fits". It was obvious she must have lain so, for some time, without assistance. Charlotte, in lifting her up, was not prepared for the fact that Kitty would be such "a dead weight", and let her fall, without intending to do so.

At this Charlotte screamed, arousing the house in her pitiful extremity.

"My child is dead! Dead!"

Not knowing what she did, Charlotte ran into the street. She must have looked strangely young. Most people obviously thought her a lunatic. How else could one describe what was presumably a young gentleman, in shirt sleeves, wailing like a woman over the assumed death of "his" child?

"Please to come!"

Summoned back to her home, Charlotte found that Kitty was still having convulsions. They lasted in all from "eleven o'clock in the forenoon, without intermission, 'till between the hours of eight and nine next morning."

Adjoining the dwelling was the house of a Mr. Adam Hallam. Learning of the sad events taking place so close to him, he sent in "a letter of condolence" containing money. After that, he continually inquired of Kitty's progress back to health.

"I wish you to regard my table as your own," he told Char-

lotte, seeing well enough that both she and the child were close to starvation.

There was a back door to Mr. Hallam's house through which they might enter and so avoid going out into the street—with all its hazards. To spare Charlotte the mortification of being treated "as his pensioner" by the servants, he dined at home more often than might otherwise have been the case.

For all her outward eccentricity and improvident behaviour, he found in Charlotte an unexpected intelligence. She could talk well, even brilliantly, on a variety of subjects, when he succeeded in making her forget—albeit temporarily—her own plight. She enjoyed both the solace of his house and society. It came as a relief to talk to one of education.

Sooner or later in all their conversations she came back to the matter of gratitude.

"How can I thank you enough for your bounty to me and mine?"

He seemed to find her excessive praise of his kindness a source of embarrassment.

"Favours, when received, are too often forgot," she exclaimed, with vehemence.

He smiled a little. That was as might be! He assured her he had done no more than common humanity demanded. A neighbour's child fell ill: both mother and child were in need of nourishment—Mr. Hallam was a man of greater means than they were; was it strange he should seek to share a little with them?

Charlotte said that help did seem to come to her in curious ways. She named several actors and actresses who rallied, when they knew of her need.

"Mr. Garrick and Peg Woffington among them."

"What of your father, Mr. Cibber?"

Charlotte shook her head. "But my brother has been kind. And his present wife."

Theophilus had re-married and Susannah Cibber, whose name added such lustre to the stage, took it upon herself to send "timely presents", when she learned of the difficulties that her sister-in-law encountered.

"I would like to make public acknowledgement of all such kindness."

Mr. Hallam reached for his napkin and wiped a morsel of food from his lips, reflecting upon the strange situation in which his bounty had placed him.

## CHAPTER 8

### TROUPER AND VALET

*If Poverty be a Title to Poetry, I am sure No-body can dispute mine . . .*

*When a Gentleman uses me with Civility, I always do the best I can to please him.*

THE BEGGAR'S OPERA  
by John Gay

#### I

Directly Kitty recovered Charlotte began to tire of the pleasant tête-à-tête evenings with Mr. Hallam and "to creep out, in search of adventures". She still kept to the house in the day-time, never knowing when money she owed might not be sought by creditors. Mr. Hallam's bounty was of the kind she did not wish to abuse and it was becoming necessary for her to earn something on her own account. So "by owl-light", she would steal as far as the Tennis Court, on the off chance of picking up a part.

Charlotte was very conscious of her "trembling limbs and aching heart". But it was not the work she feared, as she knew she was "universally studied". Though she despised the theatre, and called it the "slaughter-House of Dramatick Poetry", it was the one place in London where she had a chance of performing.

On one such evening *The Recruiting Officer* happened to be on the bill. It was a benefit night. At five of the clock the young man who was to be "Capt. Plume" presented himself, with shame-faced manner, to confess he knew not a line of his part.

Charlotte, "in the mock Green-Room", could scarcely contain herself. "Plume"! A rôle often played by herself! But she knew that "the sound" of her voice was "particular". Unfortunately her face was equally well known.

There were likely to be present several of those officers of the Law, searching for improvident and penniless actors to clap into the "Spung-House".

Not an actor in the company could step into "Capt. Plume's" part.



"A scratch lot," Charlotte thought, the Cibber blood, as always, aroused by bungling in the theatre.

In despair, "the young gentlewoman", whose benefit it was, approached Charlotte in obvious trepidation.

"You have played 'Plume'——"

Though no danger appeared to be in evidence, Charlotte began by refusing her assistance. To tell the truth, she intended, like "Mosca", "to stand on terms, and make a merit of necessity".

Adopting a grand manner, for all her poverty, she said:

"To be sure, ma'am, I'd do any thing to oblige you: but I'm quite unprepared—I have nothing here proper—I want a pair of white stockings, and clean shirt."

In actual fact she had these articles, ready in her pocket, but preferred to let it seem otherwise. Charlotte continued, in tones of carefully studied unconcern.

"'Twould scarce be worth your while, ma'am, to pay me my price."

After some consultation, aside, an offer was made of half a crown for "Plume". Charlotte, used to the niggling ways of the profession, continued to hide her rising hopes of earning more that evening. She knew they had no alternative player. This made the bargaining little more than a routine quibble.

"Under a guinea I positively would not undertake it," she stated, letting it appear that she was far from anxious to be fatigued by such an evening's work.

To the lady herself Charlotte said there should be public payment of five shillings—and no ill feelings amongst the rest of the cast—with the balance to be handed over in private. Used to these dissemblings, Charlotte preserved an air of complete indifference.

The auditorium was close packed and there were signs of impatience for the curtain to rise. Already, it had been held over-long. The commotion threatening made the panicking young lady comply with the terms.

"Here's my hand on 't."

Charlotte made ready "with utmost expedition". Though she thought little of the histrionic abilities of the company, she knew that she herself had given a creditable performance.

The fact that she had acted in public that evening would no longer be a secret. There was still danger of some creditor seeking to relieve her of her earnings. She waited until the

place had emptied then, the precious guinea safe, looked around for someone with whom she might change clothes. Discarding Mr. Sacheverel's one-time glory for "happy rags", she took temporary leave of the "person of low degree", who had thus assisted her.

She went one way, he another. They both met at Charlotte's lodgings.

"I am greatly obliged to you," she said, parting with a valued shilling as reward.

Not long after this an individual, known by the name of Jockey Adams, applied for Charlotte to join his itinerant troop appearing within four miles' distance of London. She knew the man to be famous as dancer of "The Jockey Dance, to the tune of Horse to New-Market".

Charlotte sent back a message of acceptance and signed it, his "obedient servant, Charlie Brown".

## II

The change from "Poor Sir Charles" to plain Charles Brown involved her in a complication she had never imagined possible. So excellently, in fact, did Charlotte portray the well-bred young gentleman, that she attracted the favourable notice of a member of her own sex.

An orphan heiress took to visiting the performances of the Jockey Adams company. Only eight months separated her from her coming of age and the consequent entering upon her fortune. This consisted of "forty thousand pounds in the Bank of England; besides effects in the Indies, that were worth about twenty thousand more".

Servants, ever quick to gossip, made no secret of their mistress's infatuation for Mr. Brown. Some of Charlotte's fellow players came to her with the story. Instead of her being amused, as they had expected her to be, she was filled with immediate concern.

This made them laugh all the more.

"Indeed it is no joking matter," she protested. "Think of the poor young lady."

"But what a remedy for all your ills," one of the players suggested, with a chuckle.

Charlotte's belief that the whole thing consisted of merest tattle proved wrong. The next development was a letter from the heiress, brought by a pert, pretty maid.

The note contained an invitation "to drink tea, at a place a little distant" from the home of the orphan.

"Some young ladies of my acquaintance desire that you will sing for them. As they never go to plays in the country 'twould be a great obligation to me, sir, if you would oblige my friends, by complying with my request."

"Is it not a little strange your mistress should send for me in this way?"

The maidservant, ever ready to invite intrigue, adopted a knowing manner.

"Can it be that you are so ill-informed as to the real reason my lady desires your presence?"

Charlotte, shrugging, admitted to having heard certain rumours.

"Why, my lady would have you to husband! If you play your cards well, Mr. Brown, you might be the happiest man in the Kingdom before you are eight and forty hours older."

Such declaration from a servant gave "an odd opinion of the mistress". Charlotte was still half inclined to regard the whole thing as a jest. And not a particularly merry one at that.

Deciding the affair had gone far enough, she said: "Pay my respects to your mistress and say that I cannot wait upon her."

The maid threw up her hands in mock horror at such a proposed course of action.

"Do you not know that madam is one of the richest young ladies in all England? Why, you could ride in your own coach, in the rear of six horses, if——"

"Enough of this nonsense!" Charlotte began to be angry.

But the maidservant was persuasive. She drew a cunning picture of her employer's suffering. How she languished for the handsome acting gentleman. Could "he" be so heartless as to refuse a meeting?

The hussy even began to flirt with Charlotte, who drew back, alarmed.

In the end, Charlotte, from mixed motives, capitulated. Perhaps it was the oddity of the adventure that appealed to her, or it may have been that she felt nothing less than a personal meeting could put an end to the business.

Drawing herself up to her full height and speaking in that deep voice, she said, with cold formality:

"Tell your mistress I *will* wait upon her."

Charlotte prepared a careful toilette. Since she was to

pretend the beau, she should make the character as convincing as possible.

She knew in advance that the heiress, though not beautiful, had an agreeable personality. The young lady was reputed to sing "finely" and to play "the harpsichord as well". She was something of a linguist to all account. One way and another, therefore, Charlotte expected an afternoon free from dullness. She even anticipated a little conversation of sense and intelligence, most welcome change from the everlasting tittle-tattle of the theatre.

The heiress had two youthful confidantes in attendance. Though Charlotte did not know this, the intention was to bring about "a private marriage".

Charlotte made a general bow and took a seat close to the door, in case a sudden exit became advisable.

"La! Are you so shy as all that?" A young mad-cap of fashion pulled Charlotte from the chair and drew her across to where the heiress was seated.

Amid the awkwardness that followed, the mad-cap, after indulging in "a violent fit of laughter", withdrew with the other companion, so that Charlotte might have a better opportunity to pay her "addresses".

Suddenly more nervous than in all her dodging of bailiffs, Charlotte only could sit in frightened silence. What she had seen of the heiress she was disposed to like. Recollection of the deception being played—though it be none of Charlotte's seeking—was unpleasant.

"You were—good—to come——" the emotional tremor in the heiress's voice made speech difficult.

"So 'tis true," thought Charlotte, becoming still more embarrassed.

"I was honoured, ma'am," she began, only to break off as the heiress burst into tears.

What now? To play the gallant, tenderly amused by woman's dissembling? Instead, Charlotte followed her instincts and asked, with great gentleness, why the lady wept?

"Because I love——" blushing, the speaker was overcome by shyness.

Charlotte felt the comedy to be played out: the moment had come to reveal her rightful sex.

"I fear you are mistaken in what you believe me to be."

"Oh, no! I swear! You are most handsome and—and—gallant—gentleman——"



"You do not understand!" Charlotte went on in a quiet tone. "That I wear the garb of a man—for reasons of which I beg to be excused—does not mean——"

The heiress's stunned expression showed that she understood imperfectly the drift of these remarks.

So, with desperation, Charlotte cried: "I am a woman like yourself! Must I strip to prove it to you?"

"It—is not—possible——"

Since the young lady looked capable of swooning, Charlotte hastened across to the bell, but was halted by signs of recovery on the part of the love-sick girl. Remaining at a safe distance, Charlotte proceeded "to make a discovery" of her name and family.

"Mr. Cibber's—*daughter*?"

"Twice married and with a child to boot." The information was added, lest the heiress still had doubts.

The young lady took a lot of convincing. She would not believe what she did not wish to believe. With expression brightening, she said that "Mr. Brown" was trying to spare her feelings by falsehood.

"You have formed a dislike of my person."

"I assure you, the reverse is true."

"My maid told me you were not—insensible to my feelings towards you."

"Ma'am, do you imagine that if I were the indigent young fellow you imagine, that I would run away from one of your charm and fortune?"

"You hold a light opinion of me, Mr. Brown. I do not blame you."

"No longer shall you labour under so great a delusion." As Charlotte spoke, she was busy with the fastenings of her waistcoat.

"Now are you satisfied I did not lie to you?"

Since there could no longer remain a suspicion of doubt, the heiress, amid sighs and tears, prepared to take leave of the visitor.

"I shall retire into the country until my poor heart is whole again."

"May I express the hope that one day you will be made happy in some worthy husband?"

When Charlotte returned home, she found a group of interested play-actors agog to hear how the interview had gone. When were the nuptials to be celebrated? Which of the men



present was to be chosen to take Charlotte's place on the honeymoon?

"Since the marriage is to be secret——"

"And you are not, what you seem——"

"—How can?"

These and similar "Impertinent, stupid questions" caused Charlotte to round in fury on the itinerant troupers.

"How villainous are your dispositions! I treat the remarks with the contempt they deserve."

"Ah, then she jilted you!"

"I told her the truth about myself. Not only does she know who I am, but the whole town shall do the same. I am done with lies!"

### III

The departure from that particular town followed not long afterwards.

"Kings, Queens, Lords and Commons, were all tossed up in an undistinguished bundle from that place, and . . . escorted to another in a cart."

Such was Charlotte's description of the first of many such journeys. Unknowingly she took lodgings in the house of a bailiff. Being but ten miles from London, where there might still be writs against her, she played a slight ruse on Jockey Adams, whom she knew to be in similar financial duress as herself.

"To my certain knowledge there is a writ issued out against you."

A white lie which did not stretch the elastic of probability unduly and had the desired result in Mr. Adams' taking his company away by night.

"We have deprived the town of our incomparable representations," Charlotte said, happy in her flight from possible dangers of past debt.

Privately she thought that if noise be merit, then the present set of "comedians" were "the greatest proficient of the age". Compared to the gentility of Cibber productions, the present declamations were little better than the shoutings of floundersellers in the London streets.

The company arrived at the next town, unconventionally at six a.m. on a Sunday morning. The "unseasonableness both of the hour and day" needed explanation to the landlord, with

whom the troop hoped to lodge. Mr. Adams talked convincingly and the landlord was "an indolent, good-natured man".

"Your company is a large one, sir," was his comment.

"Indeed it is. And see what boxes we have brought."

Charlotte, suppressing a grin, knew them to be "full of nothing".

"House there!" shouted the landlord, summoning his daughter and a maidservant. "Set on the great pot for the buttock of beef and make a fine fire to roast the loin of veal. We have company!"

He ordered the ostler to carry in the weighty boxes.

Charlotte, lowering her voice to a stage whisper, said to Adams. "'Tis well the fellow does not know the burden to consist of scabardless, rusty swords and departed mopsticks, transmigrated into tragedy truncheons!"

For a week, they lived in a luxury all too rare; playing a night or two, but drawing in little money for their labours. Sauntering in with her companions, Charlotte addressed the landlord in accustomed bonhomie:

"What have we for dinner, good sir?"

With sadly altered manner, he replied: "It would be better you find your own provisions."

"That we cannot, alas," Adams admitted.

"My advice to you, ladies and gentlemen"—how the terms must have jarred him to use—"is to make one good house to pay me and march off."

One of the ladies, who suffered great hunger, turned pale. Charlotte slipped a supporting arm quickly beneath her shoulder.

"He will not let us starve," she whispered, with more spirit than certainty.

"We will leave this curs'd house!" shouted one of the men, rounding off his threat with a goodly string of oaths.

The landlord, exhibiting calm contempt of such struttings, made it all too plain that no action could have pleased him better.

Mindful of the hovering Kitty, pale and hungry as the rest of them, Charlotte sought to be mediator.

The affronted actor, thinking more of his honour than his empty belly, "scolded himself out of the house". By preserving good manners in place of abuse, she managed to make it possible for Kitty and herself to remain.

"Business continuing very shocking," Charlotte was afraid to presume longer on the goodwill of her host. She knew it was for the sake of Kitty, rather than herself, that they had been allowed to remain.

"Why not use your interest to put off as many tickets as you possibly can, and so make up your losses from the company?"

He was obliged for her suggestion, which he proceeded to carry out with enthusiasm.

Not wishing to lose the good reputation she had gained with him, Charlotte called Kitty and told her to start collecting together their things.

"On the morrow we must leave. We cannot expect his forbearance a second time."

#### IV

With exactly one shilling in her pocket, Charlotte reached London again. Within two hours or so she found lodging "at a private house, in Little Turnstile, Holborn".

Not long afterwards she was inquired for by a fresh manager. At three o'clock in the afternoon she set out, on foot, for Dartford. Lacking the money for a conveyance there was no alternative but to walk. The rain was heavy and she had on thin pumps, affording little protection to her feet. Her clothes were soaked in a matter of minutes and her hair swept to her face in damp streaks.

Each mile seemed worse than the last, but a brave, indomitable spirit carried her forward through the rain.

She reached Dartford at eight o'clock in the evening, with six hours of heavy walking behind her. According to their charter, the company's performances might not open earlier than nine or ten at night.

Charlotte found she was to go on that same evening. It was necessary to borrow clothes, her own not being dried out in time.

By morning she had all but lost her voice. In the harsh opinion of the management this rendered her useless. They gave her half a crown and her dismissal.

"An excellent demonstration of humanity," she croaked, adding that such employers regarded "players like pack-horses".

After the terrible journey back to London, her voice had

gone completely and it was only possible to make herself understood by speaking directly into a listener's ear.

Work being out of the question in such a condition, Charlotte alternately pledged her own and Kitty's clothes, for support. It was not long before the pair of them were reduced to "a bare change" to keep them "decently clean".

Slowly Charlotte's voice mended and she was once more audible. Directly she could avail herself of the owl-light, and go abroad, she succeeded in acquiring "a part in Gravel Lane". There she met a woman who placed a proposition before her.

"I have scenes and clothes in limbo for two guineas. If you could redeem them, I would make you manager of my company."

"How can I hope to raise such a sum?" poor Charlotte asked.

"Is there no one who would help?"

"Give me leave to think."

Recollecting a friend likely to pay sympathetic attention to obvious distress, Charlotte wrote "as from a spunging-house". She despatched one of the company in character "of a bomb-bailiff"—a fine piece of type casting!

The ruse succeeded and the goods were redeemed. Charlotte, flushed with hope, clasped Kitty in her arms.

"We are sailing, with a few hands, for Gravesend."

## V

Gravesend lasted a month, with a guinea drawn each week in salary. While not affluence, it was at least a measure of security.

They proceeded on to Harwich, playing a further three weeks to reasonable success. Unluckily the manageress's husband, who was not of the acting fraternity, was in Newgate, awaiting transportation. As a good and faithful wife, she felt it necessary to visit him, when she could, thereby accelerating the final break-up of the little company.

Addressing Kitty, Charlotte said:

"There is nothing for it, my child, but for us to return to London."

Subsistence became difficult once more and Charlotte, remembering her good friends among the coffee house keepers, visited them. Literally starving by day and enjoying their hospitality by night, together with not infrequent gifts on their part, she managed to exist for a time longer.

With Kitty safely in bed, Charlotte prowled the night London she knew so well. It was some time since she had visited Theophilus. The story of her Gravesend expedition and its aftermath drew her brother's ever-ready compassion.

"God knows I never have much money, but take this." He pressed half a crown into her hand. "Dine with me to-morrow, Charlotte. Not here," he added, saying it was to be at the house of a friend. The man was likely to be of service to her.

"He has a natural tendency to acts of humanity."

"I will come, Theophilus." She hesitated. "How is it with Father?"

"Can it be you have not heard the story that goes the rounds? 'Tis said that you hired a very fine bay gelding, and borrowed a pair of pistols and held him to ransom in Epping Forest."

"What monstrous lie is this?"

"Oh, a rumour put round by a super-numerary from the Lane." Theophilus smiled. "You were supposed to have routed our respectable parent together with his retinue of servants!"

Charlotte's face was serious. "He still thinks ill of me?"

"And of me, never fear! To-morrow, then, sweet sister." In grand theatrical manner, Theophilus swept to a deep bow of adieu.

The introduction to his friend served its purpose. In three days Charlotte was presented to a nobleman, just over from Ireland.

"I am desirous of finding a gentleman to valet me," his Lordship observed. "One well-bred who can speak French. Do you think, Mistress Charke, that you could serve me in this way?"

"Lord A——" was acquainted both with her identity and misfortunes. He made the only offer of employment possible at the time.

Next day she became "the superior domestic in the family". She was given her own table, "with a bottle of wine", and any single dish she chose in addition to what his lordship was having. Each Wednesday she received a guinea's wages.

His lordship had a "fille de joie" from Ireland resident with him. Charlotte found her both genteel and good-natured. These two oddly assorted women became friends; perhaps the mutual uncertainty of their tenure proved a bond!

When there was extra company, the lady shared Charlotte's



table. If no additional people were present, his lordship and the pretty paramour invited the unconventional valet to join them.

When bed-time arrived, Charlotte took her leave and returned to the lodgings where Kitty awaited her. The only drawback to any otherwise pleasant situation was that Kitty had to be left so much on her own.

"You do not have to worry on my account, Mama."

"But I do, all the same." Charlotte stroked the soft hair of her daughter. "Poor Kitty!"

Each morning Charlotte set out in order to reach his lordship's house by nine o'clock. Protected as she was by his employment, she could "cock her hat in the face of the best bailiffs, and shake hands with them into the bargain".

For five tranquil weeks she enjoyed this enviable state. She was able to give Kitty the money to buy herself adequate food. Both looked better as a result of more regular meals.

The situation might have lasted as long as his lordship remained in England. Indeed, Charlotte was prepared to consider returning with him to Ireland if he made the offer. She had it planned that Kitty might join the household in some capacity.

As always, Charlotte's evil star came into the ascendant. "Two supercilious coxcombs" arrived on a visit. Though protesting humanity, they were scandalised that a woman should be employed as valet.

"You are entertaining one of an improper sex for the post."

"What manner of crime is that?" His lordship defended his action by saying that she was "an unfortunate wretch" whom it pleased him to help.

"Never has she given me the least offence." He went further. "No man could better answer the requirements."

"Demme, my dear fellow, if you refuse to see the rights of the case——"

"What would you have me do?"

In righteous manner they delivered the veto Charlotte so dreaded:

"Discharge the woman from your service."

## CHAPTER 9

### "WHO'LL BUY MY SAUSAGES?"

*"You! Smouch! (Jew) will ye have some Pork? . . .  
Buy my roasted pig! A long-tailed pig, or a short-tailed pig,  
or a pig without ever a tail!"*

*London Street Cries from  
TRISTRAM SHANDY, GENTLEMAN  
by Laurence Sterne*

#### I

"His lordship wishes to see you," one of the other servants told Charlotte, on her arrival next day.

The summons was not unexpected. Indeed, she had known that it was bound to be the outcome of his friends' advice.

She felt no temper—she who owned the Cibber ungovernable temper in all its ferocity—only fatalistic acceptance of a return to "scenes of sorrow and desolation".

His lordship was a fine figure of a man, even when as at the moment attired, in dressing robe and not wearing his wig.

Charlotte stood politely, just inside the door. With a look of concern, he indicated a chair for her to be seated.

"You have already guessed—so much I see from your face. I' faith it was no wish of mine. But it seems that other people consider your position in the household—shall we say—irregular? I cannot fly longer in the face of convention."

"No, your lordship."

"Och, I shall be loath to lose you—but you know that already."

"I am grateful to your lordship for what you have done to help me."

"And you shall not go away empty-handed."

He crossed to the drawer where he kept loose change. The sum he counted out was a small "pittance". (It would provide little beyond momentary support for Kitty and herself.) The Irish nobleman looked searchingly at his ex-valet.

"What of Mr. Colley Cibber? Is it conceivable he will refuse help to his daughter?"

Charlotte's face became even graver. "'Tis not only conceivable, your lordship, but certain."

The last time she had heard from Colley was in a September between 1735 and 1737. She knew by heart his cruel reply to her letter enlisting the aid she felt right to expect of a father.

He had addressed her, not as a fond parent does a child, but as a man might address a stranger:

"Madame,

The strange career which you have run for some years (a career not always unmarked by evil) debars my affording you that succour which otherwise would naturally have been extended to you as my daughter. I must refuse therefore—with this advice—try Theophilus.

Yours in sorrow,  
COLLEY CIBBER."

If opportunity only could present itself, she was ever willing to throw herself at Colley's feet. To implore the only benefit she desired or expected: his "blessing and pardon".

She still did not know what she had done so mortally to offend him. That he should have referred to "evil" was a matter she found especially hard to understand. Had she ever stolen or otherwise acted dishonourably? There were womens' ways of making money, but to these she had not stooped. What she had given to men had been sanctified by marriage.

Therefore she was at a loss to understand wherein she had erred.

She had seen and spoken to him for the last time four years after becoming Richard's wife. Or, as she by then was, his widow. Charlotte had been sent for from the playhouse, where she had been appearing. "A triumvirate" was set up to effect a reconciliation. Since this hierarchy had included the eldest sister, whom Charlotte conceived to be more jealous even than in childhood, the meeting had not gone well.

Charlotte had seen herself baited, as a bear was baited in the ring.

Her family had preached at her, self-righteously, determined that all should be arranged according to their pleasure.

She had become "enraged and obstinate", in such a mood, she had been incapable of answering "their purpose". More choleric with the passage of years, Colley had become incensed with his youngest daughter.

Looking back on the scene, in the chill aftermath of self-

doubting, Charlotte saw that he was not altogether to be blamed for his attitude.

"'Twas undoubtedly my duty to satisfy any demand he should think proper to make."

If only it had not been at the instigation of those others!

Colley had worked himself into "a strong fit of impatience". He "quitted his house", without any intention of effecting a return whilst Charlotte was present. She had stayed but a few minutes longer: to save face more than anything else. In the most imperious of manners, Charlotte's sister had turned to her colleagues to inquire whether they "had done" with the miscreant.

"What purpose could be served to parley further with her?"

The sister then ordered Charlotte from the house.

She still could feel indignation in recollection of that moment.

"Why, oh why, do you hate me so?" she apostrophised the one she no longer regarded as a relation: only as an enemy.

Charlotte saw her—a souring, embittered woman, on the wrong side of middle-age, enjoying wounding a younger sister, who had no weapons with which to return fight.

"Even the little follies of prattling infancy are construed into crimes." The sister's object was "to destroy that power" Charlotte once had "in the hearts" of both parents.

Charlotte believed that had her mother been alive something might have been done to bring about the longed-for reconciliation.

What was it that the character of "Thorowgood" said in Lillo's play, *George Barnwell*?

"When we have offended heaven, it requires no more; and shall man, who needs himself to be forgiven, be harder to appease?"

When that man was Colley Cibber——

"Yet it was not reasonable to be treated as a child, when I was married and had borne a child of my own."

They wanted to deprive Charlotte of her birthright as a Cibber, and succeeded.

"Through age and infirmity, rather than a real delight in cruelty, my father has listened to slander about me . . . I hope that when his time comes to ask pardon for himself, heaven will not be deaf to him, as he has to me."

The money "Lord A——" had given Charlotte provided short relief. She was again puzzled where to find someone likely to help her.

"Try Theophilus?"

No. Not again. She must seek friends first. But there were circumstances when even friendship itself could be noticed to cool. Perhaps she made greater demands than they were prepared to meet.

As always, when Charlotte looked at that pitiful waif that was her child, she knew her heart to be heavy. Poor Kitty! Tossed from one set of dismal circumstances to the next. Never to know a real home, as Charlotte had known such blessed harbourage in her own youth. Moving from one dreary lodging house to the next, as expeditiously as credit became exhausted. Granted few children with whom to play, confidante of landlady and beggar; made old in the wrong kind of wisdom. How to plead with a usurer for more money: the way to beg a crust from the gutter.

"Such is the life to which I condemn her."

More than anything else that made Charlotte bitter towards her own father. If only he had helped with Kitty.

"I would not care for myself."

Was he so afraid that Charlotte would misappropriate such monies as he sent? Use it for her own "evil" purposes?

"If I were a whore, he could not think greater ill of me!"

Charlotte could not send Kitty to any regular school. The child had to pick education, too, by the wayside. Charlotte assisted in this, passing on such knowledge as she could. The schoolbooks were the few tattered ones that had been her own.

Kitty could read earlier than many more fortunately placed. She had a smattering of the drama not to be despised. She had heard her mother in parts and, at times, played small rôles herself, when a child had been needed on some make-shift stage where Charlotte was appearing.

When Kitty approached adolescence, she would still be painfully thin. The bones stood out against the flesh and the moulding of the cheek line was almost stark in its severity. She had soft, gentle eyes; Richard's eyes, they were. A sweet whimsical mouth and a disposition of remarkable docility.



"Have you nothing in you of the Cibber wrath?" Charlotte would ask, laughing.

The child's hair, with the suggestion of a curl, often fell lank and lustreless about her shoulders. Her skin had unhealthy paleness. She went too frequently without nourishing food. Charlotte never took food for her own consumption until Kitty had eaten.

"Life has become a burden to me," Charlotte said, sighing deeply. "I begin to think I would like to die."

"No, Mama!"

The woman started, hardly aware of having spoken the dismal thought aloud. The expression on Kitty's face made her ready to weep.

"When poverty throws us beyond the reach of pity, we are no better than the comfortless array of tattered garments in a frosty morning."

"Is there no one left to help us?"

Kitty's dress was sadly outgrown. There was little her mother could do to rectify this. But in one thing only Charlotte felt no self-reproach. Both she and the child were clean. Water did not cost money to draw. Though their collection of small clothes had become patched and shabby, as everything else they owned, they did not lack a necessary wash.

Most of Mr. Sacheverel's suits had been sold. Charlotte now possessed only one change of attire, in masculine wear, and a single tenable dress for such occasions as she still chose to wear the garments of her own sex.

"No one to help?"

Charlotte's period of irresolution was passed.

"I will take a bold stake for success! There are but two chances . . . happiness or destruction."

Kitty's elfin little face showed relief.

"What shall you do?"

"First we must leave here. We already owe too much rent to stay."

Kitty was insensible to the constant change. Having no place that was permanent, she avoided becoming attached to any set of four walls. She knew them to be too impermanent. Some places were less disagreeable than others. That was all.

Charlotte found them "a neat lodging in a street facing Red-Lyon-Square". It seemed to Kitty as though they had

moved in a ceaseless arc of accommodation around Covent Garden and the district of Holborn.

As always, Charlotte placed faith in her own persuasive pen. This time she addressed the letter to a Mr. Beard.

"—I beg to acquaint you with the sorrowful plight I am in—"

Mr. Beard replied in cash fifteen minutes after receiving the note. Charlotte recaptured her fighting spirit.

"Kitty! I am going to Newgate-market to buy a considerable quantity of pork."

"Pork, Mama?" betraying what was the closest to a feeling of surprise of which she was capable.

"We will convert it into sausages, my child."

Kitty smiled as they sallied forth to fresh adventure.

### III

Mother and daughter, laden to the extent of their carrying capacity and unused to such burdens—conveyed the freshly made sausages for sale.

"We will go only where I am known and so dispose of them with speed."

Nothing that Charlotte undertook to do astonished those who knew her well and were sympathetic towards her endeavours.

"'Tis an industrious and honest inclination to get a small livelihood, without shame or reproach," Charlotte said, offering the sausages to the first of her acquaintances.

"To be sure, to be sure! I will take three pounds. They are fresh?"

"Made this half hour past!" Kitty exclaimed, doing her share as trader's assistant.

"Your daughter grows a-pace, I declare, each time I see her."

Charlotte passed on, well pleased with the selling progress. Her burden was becoming lighter, and so was her heart.

As they moved on, intermittently touting their wares, she said to Kitty:

"The Archduchess of our family would call this a crime. Yet she would not grant me a half penny roll or a draught of small beer."

"Is it wrong, then, to sell in the streets?"

"No, child, but your eldest aunt will make it appear so!"

It was enough for the Cibbers that a female member of the family should go abroad in a man's breeches.

For a while Charlotte existed in the capacity of "Higgler". She could regard the success of the venture as tolerable.

Her friends applauded her enterprise. Was there nothing that "poor Sir Charles" was ashamed to undertake as temporary livelihood?

"We would have more of your excellent sausages," they cried, anxious to help.

"At least it is an honest livelihood," Charlotte remarked to one of her friends among the coffee house keepers. And, since Kitty was not there at the time, added, in slightly lowered voice, "I do not prostitute my person, or use any other indirect means of support."

"The more's the credit!"

"I would rather go without my supper than steal it," Charlotte went on, disposed for once to gossip. "Yet I have been accused of that, too. It was when I was with his lordship. I had in my hand a hare, which I had been sent to buy."

"I wager it had grown to a long pole of rabbits by the time the story went the round."

"And myself accused of crying them about the streets! May be you have heard tell of the flounders that I was said to be hawking?"

"How you went up and slapped the fattest of them in Mr. Cibber's face?"

"As if such falsehood could be truth!"

Charlotte continued to tout around pork and poultry, however, until she was brought low by an illness, accelerated, no doubt, by being abroad in all weathers. Her chief concern was not for herself—in truth she had a fatalistic approach to life—but because she was no longer able to carry on the business.

"You must rest in bed, Mama," Kitty earnestly enjoined.

Charlotte lacked the strength either to rise or argue.

"I would have some water to drink——"

She burned with a fever which only moisture could assuage. Kitty held the receptacle to her mother's lips.

"Is there nothing you will eat?"

"Not even one of our own sausages! Leave me, my child. I will mend best by myself."

Charlotte was "forced to depend" upon what she called

"the infant industry" of Kitty. She had not the physical strength to tout the same load as her mother. Though Kitty did what she could to sell the sausages, the circle of customers inevitably dwindled.

Charlotte could not afford to indulge herself with even the smallest luxury. While the illness was at its height, she ate no more than one of London's sparrows, yet was surprised how inroads were made in her all-too-slight finances.

She no longer had the capital—if so grand a term be applicable—to buy enough pork in bulk. The time arrived when she had her stock reduced to three pounds of meat.

By then she was up again and felt that a little air would be pleasant. She had not been outside for many days and the atmosphere indoors seemed close; even fetid.

"I fancy a walk, Kitty. Let us go as far as Red-Lyon-Fields."

"But the sausages?"

"The meat is nicely prepared. It can await our return."

Charlotte left the pork upon the table and covered it.

"Come, let us enjoy a little leisure."

Arm in arm they left the narrow streets for the countryside and Charlotte flung herself down in the sunshine while Kitty tickled her nose with a blade of grass and made her sneeze.

"Ah, rustic! ruder than Gothic," Charlotte quoted, in the words of "Mrs. Milamant". "Come, Kitty, let us see how well you know the play!"

"I would have sought a walk with you."

"—I nauseate walking; 'tis a country diversion, I loathe the country and everything that relates to it." Charlotte frowned in thought, then went on with some hesitancy. "... I hate the town, too."

At this point Kitty was overcome with the giggles.

They made a leisurely return to the lodgings. Their door was ajar, not closed as Charlotte thought she had left it.

"Oh, disastrous chance!" she cried, seeing that all the sausage meat had gone.

It was obvious that a hungry cur had made an entry and wolfed the stock.

Kitty and her mother were awed to silence, until Charlotte with a quiver of rage—or emotion—or perhaps both, exclaimed: "Inhuman appetite of a hungry dog!"

As she saw it they had neither "meat, money nor friends". Once again starvation faced them.

#### IV

The week's lodging was up next day and she anticipated a visit shortly from her careful landlord. Up till then all had been amicable enough between them. But it could not be expected to remain that way.

"What am I to say? What excuse is there to make?"

"Sorrow will not retrieve my loss, or pay my landlord."

Not knowing what she expected Charlotte rose and left the house. Perhaps fortune might direct her towards some friend; or she might have one of those sudden inspirations of hers.

"Why! Isn't it Charlotte Cibber?"

It was so long since anyone had called her by her maiden name that she was promptly brought to a halt. She turned, half afraid, what ghost of the past it would turn out to be.

The ghost proved nothing more formidable than our "old gentlewoman", who had known her as a child and whom Charlotte had not seen for many years.

"My dear, how sad you look," the old lady showed the utmost concern.

"Unfortunately it is with reason. I was just wondering where I should find the next meal."

"Is such a thing possible, Charlotte? Can you be *poor*? With your father——"

"My family no longer own me," she replied on a grim, ironical note.

"Is it because you affect so strange an attire? Tell me, dear, what makes you wear the clothes of a man?"

Charlotte hesitated, giving only just those reasons that seemed to her to meet the present case.

"Mainly," she said, "for the sake of economy."

"Surely, there is another way——"

"They are comfortable and afford me free passage in the streets."

The old lady, obviously perturbed, gave Charlotte five shillings when they parted.

So Charlotte, cheerful again, came back whistling an air from *The Beggar's Opera*.



*"The waves are laid,  
My duty's paid.  
O joy beyond expression!  
Thus, safe a-shore  
I ask no more,  
My all is in my possession."*

Next morning, when the landlord came, she paid off the lodgings and with bundles under arm, she and Kitty quitted yet another "home".

The immediate problem was where to find fresh accommodation. Charlotte was not disposed to show herself "too openly". She was a familiar figure amongst landlords. Kitty was too young to be sent on such an errand.

A young woman who knew Charlotte and had a heart large enough to pity both mother and child, offered temporary hospitality.

"You will not find affluence here, but there will be shelter for you and the child for such time as you wish."

Charlotte, greatly moved, answered. "You give this, without any view or hopes of a return."

"Friendship could do no less," was the reply.

"But family could," Charlotte thought, without, however, saying so.

Before many days had passed Charlotte had a relapse into her previous state of fever; only this time the attack was more serious. She became unconscious and the friend, who was taking such good care of her and Kitty, later admitted that Charlotte's life had been in actual danger.

"If it had not been for you," the invalid said, when rational enough to make conversation. "Kitty must have either begged her bread, or perished for the want of it."

Charlotte knew the friend could ill-afford the expense. Not yet well enough to write, Charlotte "sent a verbal message to Lord A——" He responded with "a piece of gold", expressing personal concern over her illness.

"As soon as I am able to crawl I must pay my duty there."

When she called on him, he was distressed to see such ravages of care and ill-health in the face of one who was not yet thirty.

"Indeed, I would have you back, whatever was said, were it not that I am leaving England." He smiled in gentle com-

passion. "To take you and your child to Ireland with me would not be suitable to either of us!"

Charlotte agreed, forgetful that she ever had thought it might.

"I shall always remain grateful to your lordship for all you have done for me."

"I would it might have been more," courteously he conducted her to the street door in person. He could not have extended greater politeness if she had been a visitor of rank and fashion, instead of his former valet.

## CHAPTER 10

### THEATRE MANAGERESS

*At Mr. Cibber's Academy, in the Haymarket, will be a concert; after which will be exhibited gratis a rehearsal in the form of a play, called Romeo & Juliet.*

*General Advertiser*

#### I

"It is a miracle you survived, Charlotte. What you had must have been a dreadful spotted fever."

Brett Marples, calling on her sister to ascertain that she was indeed recovered, was nevertheless perturbed to see the ravages illness had left. Charlotte, for all her indomitable spirit, was too thin by far. Her fine eyes lay back in their sockets and there were still pitted marks in her skin.

"I am more than grateful to you, dear Brett, for prescribing and sending me that emetic. You are the only one of my sisters to show the slightest interest in my existence."

Charlotte, not anxious to dwell upon the illness now that it had been fought, asked her sister to tell her about the new Marples premises.

"We opened last Thursday, the 20th instant, in Fullwood's Rent, near Gray's Inn. And provide——"

"A neat, well accommodated house of entertainment."

Brett smiled slightly, "Well, our patrons will be sure of flesh, fish and poultry, dressed in an elegant manner, at reasonable rates."

With "good wines" and the organisation of a gentlewoman, the Marples establishment had much to offer. Charlotte, with her instant enthusiasm, promised to make it known amongst those of her acquaintances.

"And to strangers, too, if I have opportunity of recommending you."

The sisters parted company in an affectionate manner. Left alone, Charlotte found herself thinking inevitably of their father . . .

Theatrical custom had it that the leading players should reside within a drum's call of those two great theatres, Covent Garden and Drury Lane. Thus it was that Davy Garrick was to be found for the most part in Southampton Street, whilst the august Colley Cibber spent the majority of his forty-three years of stage life in Charles Street.

For twenty of these years, begun so modestly in 1690, he had been part of the Triumvirate, as they called his management of the Lane in conjunction with Dogget, the money-grabber and Wilks, the lover of acting.

Colley still boasted that:

"We never had a creditor that had to come twice for his bill; every Monday morning discharged us of all demands before we took a shilling for our own use."

As far back as 1730 Colley had been created Poet Laureate and two years later allowed Highmore to purchase his share, the only one extant of the former Triumvirate.

Having retired from active stage life, Colley removed to Berkeley Square, a "genteel" neighbourhood more in keeping with his love of lordlings.

"It pleases me to write what I have found to be true of the stage," the septuagenarian told his friends. They agreed that it would be an agreeable way of passing his idle years.

Widower, tended by his eldest daughter—middle-aged, austere, even dictatorial—Colley lived in the more congenial past. He had been privileged to see the Restoration Players "the best set of English actors yet known", and they were among the finest of those pen portraits he drew so clearly from the treasure-storehouse of his long memory.

"My own share in the theatre has not been so small," he thought, with self-pride. (Conceit never had been lacking in a Cibber!) "I helped to bring in a new type of comedy, which eschewed licence."

But he was proudest of all in having been elected to White's Club—first of his profession to be so honoured.

He never tired of recalling his introduction, when the club-room was thrown wide to welcome the Laureate.

"Oh, King Coll! Come in, King Coll! Welcome, King Colley!"

To think back upon those successful days was more pleasant than the reality of the present. Had he been honest with

himself, he would have seen that he was a cantankerous old-gentleman, with few worldly pleasures left, unless it was quarrelling with his mentor—the daughter he feared rather than loved.

To recall his other children was not agreeable. Brett, a lodgings'-house keeper, who preferred to side with the one member of the family never countenanced—namely Charlotte.

Then there was Theophilus.

"Egad, the boy had promise. His 'Ancient Pistol' was a fine impersonation." Promise—yes—but how unsavoury a reputation. The last time father and son had met in the street, Theophilus was out of work—which seemed often to be the case.

"I pity you!" Colley had exclaimed, even in his growing infirmity not failing to note the fine clothes that his son wore.

"You had better pity my tailor," came the flippant reply.

A riposte such as Charlotte might have made.

And where was Theophilus dwelling? Among the less successful players who congregated around Little Russell Street, the back ways of Covent Garden or in Vinegar Yard. Colley could not feel other than censorious of his son's matrimonial troubles. A widower, Theophilus had re-married, Susannah Arne, a girl of twenty at the time. He had a daughter by her in addition to the one of his first marriage.

Susannah had left him, seeking the protection of a very worthy individual by the name of Sloper, whom Theophilus subsequently sued "for criminal conversion of his wife".

Colley was ashamed of the case and its notoriety. Susannah was shown as far less of a sinner than averred. In fact, Theophilus had *encouraged* her to go to Sloper. This had shown young Cibber to be hardly commendable as a husband.

"Susannah will not return to Theophilus."

Strangely, Colley did not blame her.

As for her career, he had had his hand in that, having trained her—albeit in the old style—when she wished to change from opera to straight acting.

"She has greatness. And I, who have seen many great actresses, should *know*."

If Theophilus was a disappointment, how much greater a disappointment was Charlotte. Each year—nay each month—seemed to bring with it some fresh scandal.

"What news of Charlotte?" Colley asked his house-keeping daughter. His voice had a suspicious quiver. This *might* have



been accounted for by his age or again, by an emotion he sought to hide from the other.

"Wearing the breeches in private life again, Father."

With unbecoming relish this perfidy was discussed.

"By such outrageous conduct, Charlotte has ceased to have any right to belong to the family," summed up the ageing woman, in her most acidulated tones.

Colley moved his gouty foot with a little grunt that may have been from pain of the foot—or—because of the estrangement with Charlotte. There were times when he longed, albeit secretly, to send for her.

"Demme, she was my favourite. My favourite, I tell you!"

He addressed the empty walls. The sentiments were not those he would have dared express in the presence of his jailer. Oh, he knew she tended him with all the frigid duty of daughterhood. She was a good woman and all his life Colley had been scared of virtue in others. He supposed that once he might have asserted himself—but he had let things go too far. The rift had widened, beyond hope of mending.

What if Charlotte called at the house? Must she be turned aside, as if she were an unwelcome mendicant?

She would not do that. She would rather send some tattered messenger with a pleading note. Or that child of hers. Colley's cheek twitched. He did not like to recall the hapless lot of his grand-daughter.

He might have offered to adopt "the brat"—had Kitty's mother been willing to let her go. He could have educated the waif, instead of allowing her to exist in heaven knew what state of degradation.

"Charlotte cares for the child," Colley acknowledged that much in his daughter's favour.

Looking back over the past few years it was not always easy to see the causes of the estrangement. Had it not begun in the time of Charke?

"Richard sowed sedition between us . . ." Since then, others had done as much—nay more.

It was her own unseemly conduct that was most to blame.

"That a daughter of mine should go abroad, dressed as a man."

The old man shuddered. For a moment he felt a cold hand on his shoulder. The hand of his dead wife. Half starting from his chair in alarm, he sank back and closed his eyes. His lips

moved soundlessly in the words with which he had seen fit to adorn Shakespeare's *Richard III*:

*"Hence, babbling dreams! You threaten here in vain.  
Conscience avaunt!"*

### III

Twenty years had gone by since "the little theatre in the Haymarket" had first opened its doors to the public. Living on sufferance and upon subterfuge as well, since all players that wandered the country or appeared in unlicensed buildings were classified as "rogues and vagabonds".

Whilst Colley saw fit to ignore the theatre in his *Apology*, for his son, Theophilus, it continued to exercise a challenge.

In 1744, ten years after that first attempt to run the place, he returned to what had become the abode of rebels. Macklin had tried a company there, composed of amateurs and his own pupils, but the season was over. From September, the theatre was free.

Theophilus called upon his sister Charlotte. "Unless your looks deceive you, you are not working."

"I have done little enough since my illness."

"Together with some fellow malcontents, I have leased the little theatre in the Hay. Do you wish to join us?"

The light which came into her face at the words must have moved the heart of even Colley Cibber himself—had he seen it.

Straddling a chair which looked ill-suited to bear a man's weight, Theophilus sketched his plans. On 11th September he would open with *Romeo and Juliet*—

"Played for the first time for one hundred years."

Though in actual fact Pepys recorded seeing Shakespeare's tragedy in 1662, Theophilus considered only the value of catchpenny announcement.

"Shall you use Shakespeare's text?" his sister inquired.

"I am revising and altering it myself from *Caius Marius*."

"Ah. Otway's ancient Roman version of the tragedy."

His daughter, Jane, was to be in this revival. With more than a degree of cunning Theophilus had sought a way in which to gallop his horse through the Act of Parliament that governed the activities of the theatre.

By calling it an academy, and not a theatre, he could then fit in a dramatic performance—thinly disguised as "a rehearsal

in the form of a play"—into the permitted structure of a concert.

The idea was ingenious and a way in which regulations would seem to be circumvented.

"If you have a mind to move to my home, Charlotte——"

The happiness engendered by the suggestion was so great that she was unable to speak. Theophilus, in his rough kindness gave a friendly pressure to her shoulder. And so it was settled.

From 11 September until 22 October, when the Lord Chamberlain ordered the closing of the playhouse, Charlotte lived in a fashion more congenial than any since she had left home. Here, for change, was the family life she had so sorely missed. She was not amongst strangers, but amongst relatives.

True her sister-in-law, Susannah, was no longer part of the household. Loving Theophilus as Charlotte did, she nevertheless found his conduct in regard to his second wife deplorable. Indeed it angered her so that she could not bring herself to speak of Susannah.

Kitty, too, was happy, having the unexpected companionship of her sixteen-year-old cousin, Jane—Jenny as they called her.

For Charlotte the greatest pleasure was derived from conversations she could have with her brother. It was a companionship she often had longed for in loneliness. Here was one to whom she could talk as equal. A man of education equivalent to her own. Only when she was under his roof, did she realise how little mental stimulus she had derived from the casual companions of lodgings and the acquaintances of the lowly theatres, where she had performed.

He followed *Romeo and Juliet* with other pieces, amongst them, *Cymbeline*.

"You have the likelihood of a great run, Theophilus."

"If that is true, there will be jealousy on the part of other managements."

Whatever the reasons behind the order of the Lord Chamberlain, there was no question of ignoring its command.

Theophilus gave a philosophical shrug. After all, it was not so bad for him. On the suppression he was invited to play at Covent Garden. But for Charlotte, it was serious.

"What shall you do now?"

Exerting every ounce of her Cibber obstinacy, Charlotte determined to carry on in management at the theatre. Indeed

it was only by his going that such a thing became "practicable". As she said, with a joking spirit:

*"We did our safety to our weakness owe,  
As grass escapes the scythe by being low."*

Theophilus was quick to think how he might help his sister and those of the company "who had a mind to try their fortunes" with Charlotte.

"You shall have the advantage of Jenny's performance, since you are left suddenly, and in distress."

At sixteen Jenny Cibber was already full of tender promise. Charlotte determined to be industrious in her efforts and wise in her casting of the plays.

"Our figures are agreeably matched, Jenny. I have the bulk and stature for most of our modern fine gentlemen and you exactly tally with me in that respect."

On 14 September Theophilus had been able to announce a performance "bespoke by several ladies of quality". And on another occasion it had been true when the *General Advertiser* stated, "Many persons of distinction were last night in the pit and gallery, who could not find room in the boxes."

In *The Conscious Lovers* Charlotte, Theophilus and Jenny had appeared together. Charlotte had been "well received" as "Young Bevil" and there was no reason for her to suppose her personal success would diminish in the absence of her brother. Besides, she had Jenny.

But not for long.

Charlotte was preparing a revival of *Pope Joan* with Jenny as the intended "Angeline", when Colley decided to emulate the *deus ex machina* of the scene. Theophilus received "positive commands" to withdraw Jenny from Charlotte's company "on pain of" incurring Colley's "displeasure".

As Theophilus argued:

"What is there I can do, my poor Charlotte, but comply?"

"'Tis monstrous unfair." Her cheeks reddened with mortification. "Even when under age I was in capital characters at Drury-Lane. What degree of theatrical dignity has Jenny superior to myself?"

"Indeed none that I know of," answered Theophilus.

"In regard to birth I presume myself to be upon a par with her; as her grandfather's daughter, and her father's sister."

"That, too, is true, Charlotte."



"My only disgrace is being under misfortunes."

Theophilus regretted that Jenny's name had to be left off the bills for *Pope Joan*. He was even more distressed when Charlotte told him people had "sent back their tickets—with various excuses for their non-attendance".

"They are fond of seeing Jenny and encouraging her."

"As I understand it, Charlotte, the family debated the whole question amongst themselves."

"And I can tell you what they will have said!" She began to mimic the censorious tones of her eldest sister: "'Twould be a scandal for Jenny to play with such a wretch as Charlotte. It would be lowering Jenny to be seen with her, now Theophilus is not there to keep her in countenance."

He did not blame his sister for such bitterness. It was merited. Such was Colley's sway even in old age that none could afford to ignore his commands.

Jenny herself was unhappy to desert, but equally powerless to go against the family decree.

"I would have been glad to stay with you, Aunt Charlotte."

"'Tis to be hoped they will not seek to turn you against me, child."

"Oh, no!"

"Do not be so sure! If you wish, keep a secret pity for me in your heart—but—do not avow the fact in public. Your grandfather is easily wrath. 'Tis best you should regard me as a stranger."

That the Cibbers should have used the innocent Jenny as an expression of their hatred, was something Charlotte found hard to condone.

"Had she stayed, it might have been useful to both . . . Time, experience and observation have furnished me with some little knowledge of the stage . . . I would have rendered it serviceable to my niece . . . She would, on her part, by her performance, have been greatly beneficial to me."

#### IV

The Haymarket defeated Charlotte, as it had twice defeated her brother and she was shortly expelled from management.

She had meantime moved to an apartment, it no longer being permissible for her to remain under the same roof as Theophilus.

It was a strange kind of compensation that, in his "hurry



of business" he found himself unable to give the necessary tuition in the rôle of "Indiana". In the care of an aunt, Jenny was sent for several days to Charlotte for tuition.

She carried out the instruction with a sense of seriousness—almost of dedication.

"I can teach the art of speaking and acting. There are no pains I would spare to help Jenny."

Something of this patient willingness must have been apparent even to the silent watcher at the lessons.

"No, Jenny. The line should go—so," and Charlotte corrected an inflection here, and emphasis there.

Jenny, who had a sensitive nature, could not fail to be aware of the affection for her which Charlotte hid. Every once in a while there would be a softening of the voice or a glance quickly met and held a sympathetic moment. Jenny, on her side, ached to be allowed to show her own grief over all that had happened. Why must they ostracise that tall, unloved woman and try to pretend she no longer belonged to the Cibber family?

When the lessons were over, Charlotte gave a gentle, hurt smile, saying, with head held bravely erect: "*Good-bye, Jenny.*"

## FROM FAIR TO TAPROOM

Song, THE COUNTRYMAN'S RAMBLE THROUGH  
BARTHOLOMEW FAIR. Circa 1699-1714

## I

Certainly a great deal of drinking went on, but Charlotte

was never one to be censorious. Did it matter if people visited a "music booth" in order to watch a dancing cabaret and partake of liquid refreshment at the same time?

She was part of the crowd of those men and women of enterprise who put on displays of rope dancing, "conjuring, drolls acted by human players, peepshows and puppets".

Not all the performances were bad. Many good and even famous actors were to be seen at Smithfield.

Charlotte loved to visualise the scene of Bartholomew Fair.

The lines of the booths, lit by glaring lamps, and the noise of the close-pressing crowds. All the smells of London were there in plenty. Unwashed bodies: the crude burning oils and waxes: hedge-wine, march beer, saleps—a hot drink made from powdered salep—the food stuffs of flummery, hot loaves, "fine China oranges"; "Washballs" (soap) and clothes worn too long unchanged.

Scented fops, with rouged cheeks and affected manner. Scholar boys, with red hands and shiny noses: the mob, the rabble, those who were "clear" (drunk to the limit) and sailors ashore with money to spend. "Cunning men" who told fortunes to the credulous: those who wore close-fitting Newmarket coats for riding. "Ticket-porters", licensed by the Corporation of London; men who paused to take snuff and, likely as not, had their pockets picked by an expert. Bawds and inn-keepers, mixing with people of quality and servant-girls seeking a man to pick-up for the evening. Footmen, ready to shout at the players. "Links" off-duty and out for enjoyment; the urchins, the beggars and people of great importance.

"A way there for his Highness the Prince of Wales!" and soldiers would clear a pathway for royalty from amongst the crowds.

Oh, the cacophony of shouts and laughter, "and penny whistles". From the balconies above the booths, lusty-lunged showmen were bawling their entertainments to the passers-by. Parades "of flashy kings and queens and heroes", were frequent: doubtless intended to lure ever more patrons to visit the booths. There were the gambling rooms and the haunts of the professional whores: each had its place in the scheme of the Fair.

What if there was rioting in the dark alleys? A woman's scream, hushed by a hand across the mouth? A drunken man, left lying where he fell, bemused, dreaming, perhaps of the sea,

since the flip-flap of the showcloths, blowing in the air, was not unlike the sound of sails.

For threepence and a shilling—all this and more. An actor of repute, anxious to raise the standard of the plays offered and, in the adjoining booth, as like as not, a bear on its haunches, amusing the crowd. Charlotte declaiming the "lengths" of her part and, hidden in the background, Kitty working on a stage effect that was make-shift, as the back-drops to the play.

Bartholomew Fair . . . A place where Charlotte could forget the times she had been "without sixpence in the world to purchase a loaf" and remember only the garish colours, the clash of noise, and the dirt of the ground trodden under by a thousand feet.

Whenever Charlotte was "in business" rumour of the fact spread among her creditors and she would find herself "obliged to decamp". Only the pressure of necessity allowed her to give her professional services so cheaply.

"I then was what I made myself," she thought, not without a touch of philosophy.

She had purchased her independence dearly indeed. All the hardships were preferable to humbling herself before her eldest sister and being forced to a life of rule in order to enjoy the recognition of Colley himself. The original fault was possibly her own and the reason why she must submit to every hateful abuse of talent in under payment.

She found it "highly necessary to set apart the remembrance" of what she had been. Though she did not owe more than five and twenty pounds in the world, the knowledge of insecurity persisted. She came back and acquainted Kitty with the latest news:

"In order to defend us both from want, I have this day entered upon an agreement with a master of legerdemain."

Together she and the new manager "tragedized in a place called Petticoat-Lane, near White-Chapel".

And there she reverted to "that darling name of Brown". It was, when all had been said, "a very great help" to concealment. Charke was too notorious a name amongst creditors and she had to admit that Sacheverel stood little higher with them.

It was after visiting a one-time friend of the Cibber family that Charlotte entered upon a period as waiter.

"There is nothing we can do to help you with money,

Charlotte, but it is in our hearts to serve you. What means of livelihood would you adopt?"

Charlotte said that there was nothing "which did not exceed the bounds of honesty" which she would consider unworthy to try.

"I have been so inured to hardships of the mind, I should think those of the body rather a kind relief."

"My husband does not know who you are," the lady admitted.

" 'Tis best I appear an entire stranger to him."

The good woman nodded.

"This is a poor young gentleman of decayed fortune," she said, introducing them. "Is it true that there is a vacancy at the King's Head at Mary-la-Bonne?"

"For a waiter's place. If Mr. Brown so wishes, I will speak for him to Mrs. Dorr."

"I should be grateful if you would." When he had left them, the woman was full of copious apologies for the suggestion she had made.

"Indeed I can hardly bear to think, Charlotte, of you——"

"I have neither pride nor position. Why should I object to a respectable employment?"

Next day the equally unsuspecting Mrs. Dorr interviewed the applicant at her tavern.

"I think well of your appearance, sir. Since you are well born and bred, I am afraid my service will be too hard for you."

Charlotte looked melancholy. Not, as Mrs. Dorr imagined, because of being afraid of the work, but because there seemed a chance the much-longed-for employment might be snatched from her. "Here you would be liable to impertinence from the lower class of people, who, when in their cups, pay no regard either to humanity or good manners."

"I beg you, ma'am, not to be anxious for me. Notwithstanding I was not born to servitude, since misfortune has reduced me to it, it would be foolish pride on my part not to forget what I had been."

Mrs. Dorr, a facile weeper at any time, was full of tearful sentiment at the thought of "the young gentleman's" courage in adversity.

"You may consider yourself engaged, sir. That is—Mr. Brown."

Charlotte commenced at the tavern on the following morn-



ing. Before the job had been definitely assigned to her, she had not thought it prudent to mention Kitty.

"Mrs. Dorr, I forgot to tell you that I have a small daughter."

"So young a gentleman with a child?" The tone was half incredulous.

Charlotte could not help thinking that her new employer was a very gullible person. Smiling politely, Charlotte said she herself was gone thirty. Kitty was "about ten years of age".

"Is your wife living?" there was rather an anxious note in Mrs. Dorr's voice. Such complications were tiresome, when everything promised to be so agreeable.

Nothing if not inventive, Charlotte said that Kitty's mother had died "in child-bed".

"A young fellow does not often speak so feelingly of a daughter. Bring her to see me to-morrow."

Charlotte did not have to school Kitty in a familiar part. The only difference this time was to use the word "father" where, on their own, she would have said "mother".

Mrs. Dorr received the child warmly and was compassionate with both over their supposed loss.

Kitty sat with discreetly lowered eyes, answering only those questions that were put to her. She never recognised that she was being made to practise deception. Her meek, submissive nature and her admiration and love for her sole protector in a hard world, made it easy to please in such matters.

"You must come again, my little maid, if your dear father will bring you with him."

Mrs. Dorr, out of deference to her waiter's station in life, allowed Charlotte to share the same table. An unprecedented departure from established custom.

"Sir, would you be good enough to fetch——"

"Why, Mrs. Dorr, you must not call me that, seeing that you are my employer."

A look of pain crossed the poor woman's face. With obvious unwillingness, she substituted the name of Charles. Charlotte, whose habit it was to put everything she had into each fresh enterprise, ran up and down the stairs with the agility of one who had never been other than a gentleman of the "tap-tub". Mrs. Dorr seemed surprised that one of gentle breeding should exhibit such handiness.

On Sunday Charlotte became anxious, lest one of the fre-

quenters of the popular tavern should recognise her. Though she waited on twenty or more customers during the day, not one of them knew her by sight. Her nervousness passed and she settled into a sense of greater security.

A number of foreigners frequented the "Ordinary" and Mrs. Dorr, knowing no languages, had previously conversed to them in signs. The advent of Charlotte altered this. What with the French tailors and the German "peruke-makers", Charlotte had plenty of exercise in foreign tongues.

"La!" Mrs. Dorr exclaimed laughing, a plate in her hand. "I find this a pleasant change. Each Sabbath I have had to eat an English dinner—in pantomime."

So grateful was she that she gave Charlotte half a crown on the spot.

By her own wish, Charlotte slept out and the few hours she was not on duty were devoted to Kitty.

Mrs. Dorr continued to treat her more as a "son" than a "servant".

Often Charlotte stayed as late as eleven at night and did not relish the march through the fields down to Long Acre. But luck accompanied her and she fell foul of no footpads on evening patrol.

"Doubtless they take me for a raw, unthinking, penniless 'prentice, unworthy of their observation!"

Weekdays being quieter than Sundays, Charlotte was able to employ some of her leisure in the garden. It seemed a long while since she had worked in one; it brought back a certain nostalgia for her own childhood.

"If only I had appreciated what I possessed then."

One day, when she was "setting some Windsor beans", a maid came out for a gossip. The dumpy creature stood watching Charlotte awhile, then, adopting an air of great mystery, said she had "a secret to unfold".

Charlotte displayed little interest, expecting it to be some tattle about the girl's young man.

"Promise you will never tell, Charlie?"

"Keep your own secrets, wench," was the reply, accompanied by some busy work with sun-burned fingers.

"'Tis something as might turn to your advantage—if you make proper use of it."

"What nonsense are you prattling?"

"You could marry Mrs. Dorr's kinswoman."

"What grounds have you for such a supposition?"

"Only that she would like you as master."

Recalling the incident of the heiress, Charlotte made haste to stop the garrulous maid's tongue. She said, with violence, that she would not have any step-mother using Kitty ill.

"I have too strong a memory of her own mother to enter into matrimony a second time."

Mrs. Dorr's kinswoman was a very different individual indeed to Mrs. Dorr herself. In Charlotte's opinion the young woman had no qualification to recommend her to the regard of anything beyond "a porter or a hackney-coachman". It was evident that the maid had carried back the remarks of Charlotte. "A strangeness ensued." Things were not made better when a frequenter of the house suggested that Charlotte was not a man at all. Confronted with the "revelation", Charlotte made no attempt to deny the truth. In fact she confirmed it.

"How dare you say that I am in love with you!" stormed the outraged young woman. "The insolence of it!"

"Must I remind you that the whole thing is of your imagining, mademoiselle?" In a studied insolence, Charlotte laughed. The situation shortly became untenable.

Even after Charlotte had left the tavern, Mrs. Dorr found her sex hard to credit. However, she came to visit Charlotte in Drury Lane. She was again in male habit.

Charlotte assured her that it was not always the case. Theatrical productions were in contemporary costume.

"To-day I am playing a part for a poor man and must provide my own attire."

She explained that she was helping Mr. Scudamore: one-time actor and Serjeant of the Dragoons. The part was "Plume". She was also engaged for *Sylvia*.

"I have written a prologue on the occasion for Mr. Scudamore to speak." Without waiting to be asked, Charlotte quoted a line or two:

*"From toils and dangers of a furious war,  
Where groans and death successive wound the air——"*

"Most excellent!" exclaimed the fatuous Mrs. Dorr.

"At all events my zeal will excuse my deficiency."

"I wish I had known you better when you worked for me. I would not have parted with my man Charles. I understand that you are capable of being Master of the Ceremonies, in managing and conducting the musical gardens."

Mrs. Dorr had "a very fine spot of ground" which she desired to use for such purposes.

"I would have trusted the care of it to your government."

The offer had come too late. Charlotte was sorry to think that such a scheme might have kept the good lady safe in her tavern. As it was, she was driven from it, a short while later, and "reduced to very great extremities".

## II

Theatrical employment being intermittent and on the whole unpaid, Charlotte again brought her brains to bear on the problem of a more settled form of existence. With Kitty rising eleven, a home of greater permanence ought to be attempted.

Remembering the tavern, it occurred to Charlotte that she might do worse than run an eating place herself. She had learnt much from her stay with Mrs. Dorr.

To start a house demanded ready money. In considering a source so far unprovoked, Charlotte decided that the honour of supplying help this time should fall upon her uncle, John Shore, the ex-Serjeant Trumpeter of England. She had written sufficient begging letters to have acquired facility in the task.

"I implore your assistance . . . for the sake of . . . your deceased sister (my dear mother) . . . I ask only as much money as would be necessary to set me up in a public house."

While she expressed a wish to put the financial transaction "upon the foot of borrowing", it was "ten millions to one" whether she would be able to repay the loan. Since to break a promise of repayment must "be subject to his displeasure", Charlotte suggested it had better be a gift:

". . . if you consider my circumstances worthy."

The uncle ordered her "to take a house directly" so that he might be "assured of the sincerity" of her "intention". Charlotte did not allow this touch of doubt on his part to upset her. After all it was a long time since he had seen his niece. She did not underestimate the number of rumours as to her wild mode of life.

Having "been in a hurry" from the hour of birth, Charlotte failed to exhibit the slightest caution in her quest.

"I do declare here is a house with a bill of sale!"

The place was in Drury Lane and it was only after making all the arrangements that Charlotte discovered its reputation. One of her friends told her the unhappy truth.

"It has been most irregularly and indecently kept by the last incumbent."

Hearing the person's name, Charlotte looked mildly startled.

"A celebrated dealer in murdered reputations, wholesale and retail."

"A pox on that! I will away to tell my uncle how charmingly I am fixed!"

Mr. Shore, not knowing enough about the district in question, did not discover the imprudence of her choice—if choice it were, since she had looked no where else.

"Here is a bank note, as I promised, and a sum in gold besides."

She found it hard to curb her impatience, to be on with the new project, long enough to thank him, "in that respectful manner which duty" obliged of her. Gravely he saw her out to the coach and stood frowning as she waved an airy farewell.

"I doubt I shall see that money again," he thought, re-entering his own house.

Charlotte's natural buoyancy began to assert itself during the drive in the coach. Was the happiness too great for truth?

"Let me not wake from this dream," she begged, feeling the gold he had given her, as if fearful it would melt.

She had no patience to go all the way to her home but stopped instead at the newly acquired tavern. There she joyously re-counted the money and read afresh the banker's note. In imagination every shilling had grown to the stature of a pound.

Mindful of a writ issued against her four weeks earlier, Charlotte decided it might be more prudent to pay the creditor in question before anything else was done.

"True he dropped the action through being unable to find me——"

She handed over the money and obtained the receipt for it. She then went "to all the brokers in town" to obtain the household furniture. They were willing to accommodate her and in less than three hours she had acquired everything—and indeed more—than she needed.



Directly she had the "undistinguishable parcel of goods" in the house, she took a fancy to spend the night on the premises.

"It is after five of the clock already . . ." Beds were erected and everything put into order. She did not sleep, for the simple reason that thirteen hours went by before she completed the work.

Within two and a half days, she opened the doors of the new eating-house. As was customary on such occasions, she gave away "an infinity of ham, beef and veal, to every soul who came and called for a quart of beer, or a single glass of brandy".

Many of the faces she never saw again. Doubtless people knew when they had done well and kept away lest the owner of the place regretted such generosity.

When it came to reckoning, she found she had spent close on seven pounds in twenty-four hours and taken—"nothing at all".

Soon she was inundated with the "unprofitable custom" of out-of-work actors. They styled themselves "comedians"; a tag sufficient, in their estimation, for credit pending an engagement.

"You come very great distances," Charlotte commented dryly.

"Such is the fame of your establishment," was a typically unabashed reply.

She let three rooms on the premises. As might be expected she was unlucky in her choice of tenants.

The subsequent fate of each was in a sadly familiar pattern. Recounting the story of her lodgers, afterwards, Charlotte said, drawing a quart of beer for a customer:

"One of the party has very narrowly escaped hanging . . . another reduced to common beggary, and lying on bulks . . ."

"And the third?" taking a good quaff of the beer, as became a thespian with no theatre in immediate prospect.

"Transported for life."

It was not all at once that Charlotte discovered what went on in her cellar. The water was laid there, but that did not run nearly so fast as the beer. This was collected in pails and taken up to the garrets, where gentry became excessively drunk in consequence. One miscreant told upon the other.

"Did you see what the stout man carried upstairs?"

Was that the gentry quarrelling in their cups?

She despatched a helper to investigate the rumpus.

The impeachment of the men by the women and vice versa began to make Charlotte alive to other possibilities. One thing she was determined to prevent. A return to the old evil ways of the house.

"I will have no bawds in my place," she announced in forth-right manner.

The sniggers changed to shrugs.

Kitty, who saw more of what went on than did her trusting mother, suggested that Charlotte might with advantage be "a little peery". The result of investigation was not reassuring.

"Oh, my child, you were right! They have taken violent fancies to my very candlesticks and saucepans——"

"Your pewter is terribly shrunk."

"And my coals daily diminished."

Charlotte could only suppose the coal carried off in the same manner as the beer had been. She was also forced to conclude that the dog, credited with the stealing of "three parts of a joint of meat" existed only in the guilty imagination of the thief.

So heavily was her stock impaired, that such profits as she had made could not make up "the horrid deficiency". So head in hands, Charlotte faced yet another failure.

"I dare not make a second attempt on my Uncle."

Kitty, kneeling beside her, anxious eyes upon that strong, well-loved face, listened fearfully.

"I must be prudent and throw up my house."

The child remained silent. After all it was no more than she had expected.

"I shall disrobe my own apartments of their furniture and quit them. Then the thieving crew will be obliged to disperse."

That John Shore was not to be reckoned upon for any future "pail of milk" seemed proved when, "ever touched in his brain", he married his elderly maid.

"At an age when he and she both had more occasion for a nurse than a parson," was Charlotte's verdict on the misalliance.

Being an heir-at-law, she speculated upon the chance of upsetting his will. He was "incapable" of making one that could "stand good". An appeal to the Court of Chancery?

"She shall not find me quite so passive," Charlotte thought, when the time came for John Shore to die.

Death and wills were matters for the future: even, perhaps for posterity. Meanwhile she and Kitty had to live.

Once again Charlotte wearied, but never entirely disheartened, went by owl-light "to prog" for employment.

## CHAPTER 12

### "VOLUNTARY VAGABOND"

*Well, after travelling some days, whom should I light upon but a company of strolling players. The moment I saw them at a distance my heart warmed to them; I had a sort of natural love for everything of the vagabond order.*

ADVENTURES OF A STROLLING PLAYER  
*Essays 1765, Oliver Goldsmith*

#### I

"I was sitting in my own dining-room on Sunday night," scratch went the pen of Horace Walpole, recording the incident, "when I heard a loud cry of 'Stop thief!' A highwayman had attacked a post-chaise in Piccadilly; the fellow was pursued, rode over the watchman, almost killed him, and escaped."

This was the London of Charlotte's owl-light hours; a place Fielding compared to "a vast wood or forest in which a thief may harbour with as great security as wild beasts do in the deserts of Africa or Arabia."

A London where Sir John Vanbrugh's house, opposite "the little theatre in the Hay" was nevertheless in the country. Though Hanover, Grosvenor, and other Squares had risen in the fourteen years that followed the start of the theatre, and new streets were laid on all sides of the Squares, to the North and out to the West there remained the green fields, milkmaids, hayricks and farm buildings. All within distance of a short stroll.

In contrast again, was the City, with its commerce, where young merchants jostled the barristers and law students of the Inns of Court, a mile beyond the dark, disreputable streets off the Piazza. Cheap lodging apartments existed, where a woman might earn her bread and no questions asked. The hide holes of those avoiding creditors—if they did not flee London, as Theophilus had done, when pursuit became too warm.

This was the London that Charlotte was shortly to forsake for the best part of nine years, which she was to spend "on the road" as a "voluntary vagabond".

For the present, however, she had no plans for abandoning

a familiar centre. Things continued to be difficult. As she said to Kitty:

"I must trust to providence from time to time for what I can get by occasionally acting."

In the main Charlotte had to consider herself unfortunate in this quest, though at regular intervals of every few weeks her spirits would be relieved in unexpected fashion. One such happening was His Grace the Duke of Montague, showing sympathy for her misfortune, sent a bounty of "several guineas".

Hard on this little success came the engagement to work with Mr. Russel. He was running puppets in Italian opera at "Mr. Hickford's great room, in Brewer's Street".

"You understand the management of the figures and the language they sing."

She did indeed. So well did she acquit herself that after the first night's performance, Mr. Russel hired her, "at a guinea *per diem*".

"I would have you move Punch in particular."

This venture held every promise.

Without boasting, Russel said to Charlotte, when they had made their bargain:

"This affair is carried on by subscription."

"In a most grand manner, I do declare," was the approving comment. So used had she become to presentations that were slipshod and often below third rate in their standards, that anything put on well aroused the genuine warmth of the artist in her.

Mr. Russel had "ten of the best hands in town" for his "band of music". Nothing, it appeared, was being compared.

Charlotte said:

"I notice the costumes of some of the female figures are ornamented with real diamonds."

"They have been lent for that purpose by several persons of quality."

Charlotte was happy with this puppet theatre, for she liked working the figures—though Mr. Russel's were smaller than those she had handled with Yeates. Then, too, it was pleasant to collect her salary, "every day of performance". Yet such was her reputation with creditors that she felt compelled to continue her precautions.

Between five and six of a morning she made her way across



St. James's Park, to Panton Street. Waiting until Hickford's maid was up, Charlotte remained on the premises through the day. When she left them at night, it was by quickly mixing in the thick of the crowds.

Regular work enabled her to purchase new clothes for herself and for Kitty.

"Now I confess! you are fashionable as one of the female figures in Mr. Russel's theatre."

To Kitty clothes were something to cover nakedness rather than a source of pleasure—so little opportunity had she had of enjoying what was new. Now she moved and strutted, not ill-pleased with herself. She was springing up tall and straight, though she had not filled out. The rounded line of her breast was accentuated by the hollows of her neck. The hips were straight as those of a young boy. Considering the irregularity of her meals and the whole condition of life with Charlotte, it was to be marvelled that Kitty looked even as she did.

Charlotte could see the childhood being left behind in adolescence. How many years had passed since marriage to Richard! She was no longer thirty: already she could contemplate the age of forty from measurable distance.

If there was any stability in Charlotte's life, which was questionable, then it must have been the necessity to struggle for existence from one day to the next.

"Let this last a little while," she thought, secure in Hickford's room at Panton Street. Happy moving Mr. Russel's puppets for him, and supplying some of their human voices. So genteel—so successful did everything seem—that the shock was that much greater when Mr. Russel went bankrupt and was imprisoned in Newgate.

Surprise Charlotte was incapable of feeling. The reverses she had known had been too many. But she was sincerely grieved, not merely for herself, but for Mr. Russel. So directly she heard the regrettable tidings she went to visit him in prison.

"'Tis a sorry pass in which you find me," Mr. Russel observed, a somewhat wild look in his eyes passing unnoticed in the gloom.

"I have not the power to deliver you from this misfortune but there is a way in which I could help. I will provide performers, including my own services, and take over the management of your theatre for you. I do not ask fee or reward, unless

the nightly receipts allow. If only you had your liberty restored, that would be reward enough for me."

Charlotte added that she would not wish any handling of the money. Russel should provide his own "door and office-keepers."

"If I should engage them on your behalf, I would enter into an agreement with them to be paid nightly." As regards herself, she was willing to gamble upon success. If the venture succeeded, then she left it entirely to Mr. Russel's generosity what payment, if any, he wished to make to her.

Instead of his expressing pleasure at her unselfish proposition, he took instant offence. Charlotte was troubled, because it was so unlike him. Only when she had been speaking to him for a while did she reach the reluctant conclusion that he had become mentally deranged by his misfortune.

She let two days elapse before she went again to Newgate. In the meanwhile she wondered whether a certain comedy of this, which she knew to have merit, might not be brought to "the Hay-Market stage".

"If it is not in the hands of his creditors."

However, it was: a fact that frustrated her intentions.

By her second visit, Mr. Russel had become a "drivelling idiot". He could not speak sense. From another source she learned how he had given vent to "heart-rending sighs and bitter sobs", accusing one who had raised "a contribution" on Russel's behalf from amongst the nobility, of decamping with the hundred odd pounds so collected.

Charlotte stayed only a little while, since there was nothing she could do to alleviate poor Russel's condition.

When she reached home Kitty wanted to know how "the gentleman fared". Her mother's face was grave.

"I fear he has lost his wits, poor creature."

Passing Newgate about two weeks later, Charlotte decided to inquire about her former manager. She had heard nothing meantime and was troubled.

"Mr. Russel was removed by a *Habeas* to the Fleet."

"The Fleet" was not out of her way so she stopped there accordingly.

Having expressed her concern over Mr. Russel, Charlotte thought the woman addressed eyed her with a trace of suspicion. However, the manner was civil, though not friendly.

"If you will mount two flights of stairs, you will find Mr. Russel."

No effort was made to accompany Charlotte, and she blundered into several wrong rooms before arriving at the one intended.

There, to her horror, she found Mr. Russel laid out in his coffin. The coffin had been sent in by a friend who respected him and wished to prevent the final indignity of pauper burial.

Charlotte did none of the things a woman might have been expected to do on such an occasion. She neither screamed nor swooned. No tears fell down her gaunt cheeks; she just stood motionless; incredulous, while believing.

Soon anger began to rise towards the woman who had sent her to Mr. Russel without the common decency of mentioning his demise.

When Charlotte, slowly descending, found the woman, the latter was volubly apologetic.

"You expressed only tender concern. Therefore I assumed you came to see his body."

"How long——"

"He has been dead these two days. I thought, being a friend, you would have known."

"I did not." Charlotte, with a kind of melancholy in her tone, expressed pleasure that he had so "handsome a shroud and coffin".

She was soon disabused. He would be removed from the coffin and divested of the shroud.

"'Tis monstrous!"

"'Tis the law," answered the woman without emotion.

Where a debtor died "without any effects or means" such treatment was inevitable. To be buried "by friends" rendered "the warden of the Fleet" liable to pay "all the debts of the deceased"—for having suffered such private burial.

"To think that humanity should strike at the dead in such a way!"

The woman gave a callous shrug.

This so insensed Charlotte that she said not only had Mr. Russel been "universally admired" but for a time he was "as much the fashion in families as their clothes".

With which remark she turned her back upon the hateful building.

She hoped to acquire the puppets "upon reasonable terms" and would have "taken them into the country". Their size would have made this easy and it seemed to Charlotte that to an unfamiliar manipulator, Mr. Russel's small figures might be more a liability than gain. However, since the landlord's valuation was sixty guineas, "money down", she reluctantly let them go.

It was then the spring of '46 and she engaged herself at May Fair existing upon those profits until Bartholomew came round in August.

From one of the inns around Covent Garden—a well known rendezvous for out-of-work players to meet touring managers (or their scouts)—Charlotte was approached on the subject of acting at "Sunning-Hill".

"The actress cast for 'Plume' and 'Sylvia' has just lost her brother."

"Yes?" Charlotte knew better than to display too great interest in propositions of the kind.

"She is—indisposed——"

From the way he spoke Charlotte guessed that it was drink rather than sorrow that had caused this inability to appear.

"I know both parts," Charlotte admitted and the engagement was hers.

When she and Kitty left London to join the scratch-company of "itinerant players", years were to elapse before they returned.

Charlotte was asked the usual questions on arrival. The manager wished to know the parts she had played. The number of lengths (forty-two lines) she could learn nightly. In a world where only three days might be granted to master "Lord Townly" and two for "Iago", quick study was an attribute.

Charlotte's answers created a favourable impression.

In all such companies the manager annexed five shares of the takings; one, in his capacity of actor, and four "dead shares" in respect of such things as scenery and costumes. Since there was invariably "a stock debt" in arrears of bills, some managers claimed what was known as "a saddle" tax

from benefit performances. A list of expenses was drawn up and deducted at the end of every performance, then shared equally among the cast—including even the spent candles—whether or not a player had acted that evening.

Before long Charlotte had seen in the company "a queen with one ruffle on" and a lord "without shoes".

"They are not very good players, Mama," Kitty ventured to suggest. By this time she knew enough of the business to be a reasoned critic. "How short of costumes they are! Only four tragic dresses amongst the ladies. And how they double—nay even treble the parts."

"'Tis convenient for us to keep out of town, my child."

The conversation took place at night when the cast had supped with the townsfolk after the play. Charlotte and Kitty were in one hard, narrow bed at an inn. At least that was an improvement upon the roadside or in the back of the cart!

The drunkenness was a thing which displeased Charlotte.

"Fancy an emperor unable to stand on his two feet and a lord as elegant as a ticket-porter."

She drew Kitty closer.

"They do not seek to harm you, child, do they?"

She shook her head. The mother relaxed. Kitty had reached an age when such complications might be expected. Charlotte knew that the rest of "the voluntary vagabonds" held herself in some esteem. For that reason it was to be hoped they would keep from molesting the child. Charlotte had no fear for herself. Love—and all its complications—belonged to the past. Besides her penchant for male attire kept men from being curious.

The life she had chosen for Kitty and herself was not easy.

The new licensing Act of 1743, while legalising such theatres as the Lord Chamberlain chose to license, still made the lot of the "itinerant players" hard. Without this authority or a magistrate's licence, they were, by law, still classified as "rogues and vagabonds". As such they could be convicted—usually by attention being drawn to them by informers, who received half the fine money, the rest going to the parish poor. The company could be cast into jail, without hope of bail or redress, for periods up to two months.

Theatrically speaking the law could be circumvented—as Theophilus had done at "The Hay"—by charging admission to a concert and putting on a play, gratis, in the middle.

Since obtaining a licence was imperative, if the company



was to open, one or two actors went in advance to "take" the town. This meant spending a shilling or one and sixpence, plying the magistrate (or mayor) with drinks during the afternoon to persuade him to grant them a licence to perform.

Another scheme was for some body, such as the Army or the Freemasons, to "bespeak" a particular dramatic performance. Good friends of the players, the masons might collect at the house of one of the Brothers and exhibit their patronage in public by walking to the theatre in full regalia.

Entrance into any town was on foot. Men carried properties on their shoulders. Only the weariest women, and those unable to walk, travelled by wagon. Charlotte and some of the others put on their showiest clothes in order to create some sort of a pageantry for the entrance procession.

As they walked, so they talked.

"I have been these sixteen years Merry Andrew to a puppet show."

Since Charlotte was interested, the man went on to tell of the quarrel at Bartholomew Fair and how the figures had been sold:

"To the pincushion-makers in Rosemary Lane."

While starving in St. James's Park he had met Oliver Goldsmith and been taken for a tankard of ale and a steak. This led to reminiscence.

"I offered my assistance first as candle-snuffer to a company. We took a large room at the Greyhound, where we resolved to exhibit *Romeo and Juliet*. Romeo's coat, turned lining outward, served for Mercutio. Juliet's petticoat was also her pall. Our landlord's own family, wrapped in white sheets, formed the funeral procession in the play."

Charlotte knew such experiences to be usual.

"To speak and act as in common life is not playing," the man went on, pleased to air his voice. "The way is, to cry, wring, cringe into attitudes, mark the emphasis, slap the pockets, and labour like one in the falling sickness."

That even had been Colley's method, Charlotte thought, with imperfect attention on the speaker.

"—in general I keep my arms folded . . . 'tis the way at Drury Lane."

"Where I have acted," Charlotte said, almost absently.

The strolling player hurriedly remembered something he had forgotten and edged away from her in awe.

Once a town was "taken" a place to perform had to be

found. It might be any room, pressed into service or a booth erected out in the fields. The traditional green curtain was slung across whatever proscenium there might be.

Mornings passed in rehearsals. Doors opened at three or four o'clock. From that time the genteel of the town could send servants to hold a place for them. Deficiencies in the cast were filled up in any way possible.

"I could wish the people of quality did not seat themselves upon the stage," one of Charlotte's friends in the company observed.

"I mind more when they answer back to us."

Kitty, in thoughtful tones, asked why their stage door-keeper must be perpetually greasy and black as a linkman.

"This day the races are on," Charlotte said without answering the question. Her voice sounded hopeful. Races meant a good "house".

"By positive command we are obliged to begin exactly at six," Kitty was quoting from the bills for performance.

"I trust the ladies and gentlemen will not take it ill that we have changed the bespoke play." They were doing *The Spanish Fryar*, with Charlotte as "Lorenzo" and her friend, Mistress Brown, as the Queen. They had no scenes together so Charlotte thought she would observe the lady's acting. Though Mrs. Brown spoke the lines with sense she leaned forward in the oddest manner.

"Do you suffer with the colic?" Charlotte asked, on Mrs. Brown's exit.

"No, I ail nothing. 'Tis a trick I have got."

By the next scene Charlotte felt it must be "a sciatic pain" in the actress's side, so low did she sink to the left.

Again Mrs. Brown denied any indisposition.

In descending from stage to dressing-room, by the tossing of the hoop, Mrs. Brown revealed herself to have naked legs. All at once Charlotte understood that the stockings had been lent to the "Torrismond", who had at least twenty holes in his dirty yarn ones. Telling Kitty of the incident later that same night, when they were by themselves, Charlotte said:

"I never saw so strange a proof of good nature, especially among travelling tragedizers."

"You have not a good opinion of strolling players, Mama?"

"'Tis a very contemptible life." She deplored the fact that too many left their own trades to become actors. "Barbers, 'prentices, taylors and journeymen weavers . . . servants out

of place. - How can such people act? They have not the least education——”

Kitty giggling, recalled a former stableman curry-combing a heroine, as it were.

“Were the spirits of departed poets to see their works mangled and butchered——”

Charlotte sighed, knowing how speeches from one play were carelessly swept up into another work. She thought too, of a performer in *Othello* whose voice recalled to her the “idea of a cat in labour”.

“Only those bred in the profession have the right to make it their calling.”

#### IV

At Cirencester Charlotte fell victim to “a nervous fever” which, with “lowness of spirits”, plagued her the best part of three years. All that while she was nursed with the utmost kindness by Mrs. Brown.

“You never repine of your fatigue,” was Charlotte’s wondering comment. “It has been uninterrupted and naturally fixes on me a lasting sense of favour.”

“You were near death, when we approached Cirencester, my poor friend.”

“Only since my illness came to a crisis have I begun to mend.”

By this time Charlotte could “creep about the house”. The apothecary, who was advising them, suggested she should ride out in the open air.

“If you are able to sit a horse.”

“Who better?” And she laughed; an almost forgotten sound.

They were introduced to “a reverend-looking elder” of sixty, with curling hair and florid complexion: the very picture of the country gentleman. He lent the ladies horses, inspiring in them “admiration and respect”.

While Mrs. Brown was at the playhouse, he often came to keep Charlotte company. Not since the days of Mr. Hallam had she been so happily entertained.

“You grow better already,” the old gentleman exclaimed, when Charlotte and her friend dismounted after about their third excursion. “You like the horse?”

“That I do, sir, it is an easy and willing creature.”

“He is permanently at your service.”

Before witnesses the horse was presented to Charlotte. The old gentleman's nephew, a young fellow by the name of James, was with them. His was the mount that Mrs. Brown had used.

His hand on the bridle, the old gentleman addressed Charlotte in a fatherly fashion. Why did she not quit the stage?

"In your weak condition, it is better avoided than pursued." A remark followed up by an invitation to the ladies to stay, for life, on his estate.

"At a place called Brill in Oxfordshire."

Smiling he told them that the household consisted only of his nephew, himself and "about seven or eight servants".

"They are employed in husbandry. I am a wealthy grazier."

Charlotte was to superintend his "affairs abroad"; Mrs. Brown have management of the family.

He advised them to tell Mr. Linnet, their manager, that they would leave the company at the end of a month.

Mr. Linnet did not press either to remain, but obliged them by accepting their resignations. Destitute players were to be had two a penny. He merely needed to send to the Inns by Covent Garden for replacements. It was where he had found old Colley Cibber's daughter in the first instance. Considering her indifferent health, she was no serious loss. Mrs. Brown would be more difficult to do without—but—since they were to better themselves, what else should Mr. Linnet do, but wish them luck?

The kindly gentleman from Brill presented Mrs. Brown with an "old-fashioned gold necklace".

"Here is a large locket of the same metal to keep it fair company, ma'am."

Charlotte, weighing the necklace admiringly in her hand, as it was passed on for inspection, assessed the worth as being at least twenty pounds.

"Do not insist that my friend wears this 'till she goes home. People would stare to see an actress so equipped. Indeed it is more proper to ornament the neck of a country housewife, than a tragedy Queen. I beg you to keep it meanwhile! My friend might lose it at the theatre."

"Your concern is touching. Won't Mrs. Brown retain the jewel in her own custody?"

"No, sir. I would prefer you have it 'till we go away."

Thoughts of an idyllic rural future in Brill went a great way towards hastening on Charlotte's recovery. No more tramping

along hard, rutted roads in all weathers! No acting of plays under the most make-shift conditions or listening to the boasts of one actor against another. Each a genius, if words were to be believed.

The friendship with the old man increased. His nephew, James, was frequently away—seeking cattle in “different parts of the country.”

“With the utmost ceremony” the gentleman asked whether Charlotte would lend him the horse, for his nephew’s use. Only until another mount could be ordered for her from Brill.

“The least I can do is to comply with the request of so valuable a friend.”

Charlotte and Mrs. Brown watched the nephew ride off on the horse in question.

“Jemmy has been away over long,” the old gentleman grumbled. “Three or four days more than was intended.” With a fine passion, he threatened to cut the luckless nephew off with a shilling.

“I will teach him to ramble when I send him upon business of weighty concern.”

“Pray, sir, do not be too hard on Mr. James.”

Charlotte’s plea seemed to appease the old man. Changing the subject, he bade her:

“Spare nothing towards the recovery of health. When Jemmy comes home, fifty pounds shall be at your service.”

But before Mr. James could return, his uncle was told to leave Cirencester at a moment’s warning. If he did not, he would be sent to jail in Gloucester. On return the nephew also was charged.

“What is the truth of the affair?” Mrs. Brown asked Charlotte, more concerned for the recent invalid than for herself.

“They have huddled up their affairs in a strange manner.”

“They stayed three days longer, than allowed, though we did not see them.”

The two women finally learned the truth from Mr. Linnet.

“The townspeople say that your pretended friends were none other than gamblers and house-breakers”. He spoke breathlessly, having come at once to see the ladies, lately of his company. Mr. Linnet showed a very real concern.

“If you listen longer to these men, you will be made innocent sufferers for their guilt.”

In some fright they returned the remaining horse and Mrs. Brown’s jewels—all stolen property. Evidently it had been



schemed that Charlotte and Mrs. Brown's belongings should be taken by the unscrupulous thieves.

While amusing Charlotte with card playing during her illness, the senior gentleman had been quick to observe the "very good linen". This, together with a present of clothes from Mrs. Brown's relations, had suggested affluence.

"They would have proved a tolerable booty," the poor women observed.

"I doubt we shall hear more of either rogue."

But they did, about a year later.

The old man "dangled into the next world upon a gibbet, either at Salisbury or Oxford". Mr. James "died raving mad in a prison, in or near London".

## CHAPTER 13

### "BROWN PASTRY-COOK FROM LONDON"

*Brush.*

*"You have an excellent taste, Madam, and I must beg of you to accept of a few cakes for your own drinking."*

*Act I, THE CLANDESTINE MARRIAGE*

*by Geo. Colman (Senior) and*

*David Garrick*

#### I

On leaving Cirencester, the company progressed as far as Chippenham, where the presence of two "elegant" inns made life more pleasant than was often the case. By this time, Kitty was beginning to assume a measure of independence. She was no longer the child-waif, over whom Charlotte must watch, but budding towards womanhood. As such Kitty had her own right to admiration and the pretty compliment, where she found them.

There was not so much a lessening of the bond between mother and child, as a slackening of it. Charlotte, one of the most independent women of her day, had no wish to deprive her well-behaved daughter of similar freedom. Kitty, on her part, did not consider it unkind to seek other companionship. Now that her mother had made a good and lasting friendship with the admirable Mrs. Brown, as kind and gentle a person as could be wished, Kitty did not feel neglectful of her parent.

The stage, as a career, occurred as the only possible one that offered itself. Kitty was scarcely more drawn to acting than her mother had been.

Kitty had grown into "a well-behaved girl", with a manner that was pleasing to any audience. Her "infinite share of humour" made her—in Charlotte's opinion—best suited for comedy.

"'Tis more agreeable to your figure and to the oddity of your humorous disposition. I wish you could play constantly in that walk: a very pleasing one, and most useful when players come to the decline of life. When they have out-lived the bloom and beauty of a 'Lady Townly' or a 'Monimia', they may be very pleasing in a 'Mrs. Day' or 'A Widow Lackit'."

Such advice to so youthful a young woman brought laughter to the lips.

"A friendly hint, my child."

"And as such I most willingly accept it, Mama."

Charlotte went on to say that some straight parts demanded little more than the ability to be "a sensible speaker".

"That I am one is no merit of my own," Kitty admitted.

"You have taught me all I know of acting."

Their next departure was to the village of "Corsham, four miles distant from Chippenham".

Kitty quickly summed up the situation there:

"We have little else to do than to walk out and furnish our keen stomachs with fresh air, and come home and gape at each other for want of a dinner."

"Bad business is a sure means to produce ill blood in a company," Charlotte frowned as she spoke. "As they grow hungry, they naturally grow peevish, and fall out with one another."

"The manager never starves," cut in Mrs. Brown. Hungry as they were, she had an equal dislike of Corsham.

Seldom without resourcefulness, Charlotte was reminded of a former invitation to join the company of Mr. Richard Elrington. She sat down and wrote to him.

"Sir,

If you would send three guineas, my friend, daughter and self, would immediately join you . . ."

Mr. Elrington being at Tiverton, despatched "a messenger on horseback" to Corsham. The Players had already left for Culompton, but he soon caught up with them.

Charlotte received a joyful letter, enclosing two and a half guineas.

"No small advantage," she told Kitty. "As the company stands, it consists but of few hands."

"And one of the women so unfortunate, that she was dead drunk in bed the first night we played!"

Mrs. Elrington, wife of the manager, was appearing with Charlotte's little company. The Elringtons quite often were in different groups. As the good lady knew *The Beggar's Opera* fully, she made up the deficiency caused by her drunken colleague, by acting both "Polly" and "Lucy" for the occasion.

To play "three times a week", within five miles of Tiverton,

meant the likelihood of, at best, one meal in six days. Culompton audiences never brought more than "twenty shillings at the fullest house."

"When the charges are paid," Mrs. Brown commented, "we gape like so many hungry magpies."

"What is our reward?" Charlotte's tone was acid. "A stock supper, which generally ends in a quarrel, by way of dessert."

## II

When Charlotte, Kitty and Mrs. Brown arrived at Tiverton, they found no Mr. Elrington to receive them.

"They do say as how he and she be gone for a night or two to their more rural retreat."

This local information was not heartening.

"I have a man and two horses to discharge," pointed out Charlotte.

As it was they had been on the road for nearly seventy miles, and lacked the extra half guinea that would have enabled them to meet travelling demands.

The three women drew aside to consult. Mrs. Brown and Kitty were a-tremble with apprehension.

"Take heart," cried Charlotte, assuming that leadership that so became her. "Let us set the best face upon a bad matter." Turning to their informant, she asked which houses Mr. Elrington used in Tiverton?

"There be one in particular," the young man, who had brought them from Wiltshire, spoke up. "The mistress be a great friend of Mr. Elrington." Grinning he added that she was also the young man's mother.

Charlotte strode confidently forward and, arriving at the house, borrowed half a guinea, in the name of her future employer. The man and the horses were accordingly discharged.

"What news of Mr. Elrington's company?"

The local guide shook a dubious head. He doubted they could survive without starvation until the manager's return.

"And that not too soon. I hear there is a play bespoke and a great house be promised."

"Will you do us the service of escorting us to where we may join the players?"

Charlotte produced a shilling and they re-mounted. Mrs. Brown by herself; Charlotte and Kitty "double, upon a strapping beast"; the guide walking at their head.

"Mr. Elrington's credit seems good," Charlotte whispered to her daughter.

A good-looking farmer saw them enter the town. He guessed that they were "comedians" and challenged them.

"That we are!"

"If you have pity for yourselves turn back!" With a "thundering oath", he predicted their immediate starvation.

Not a particularly able horse-woman, Mrs. Brown dropped her reins in fright, whereupon the animal, taking immediate advantage, tipped her into a ditch.

"Let us go back without seeing the company," was her plea.

Charlotte, who had slipped from the saddle to go to her friend's assistance, observed that the money they had would not hold out for a return journey.

"'Tis best we go forward," which they did.

Mrs. Elrington received the arrivals with joy. So vivaciously did she make light of the company's obvious misfortunes, that Charlotte decided not to return to Wiltshire by "the next post".

The bespoken play was to be *The Beaux' Stratagem*. Never had they acted before such an audience. Coming off stage, Charlotte waxed indignant at their conduct.

"In the first row of the pit sit a range of drunken butchers, some of whom entertain us with the inharmonious music of their nostrils. Behind them——" and she gestured roundly to indicate their "unsizeable consorts." "They have more vivacity and laugh and talk louder than the players."

"I have a lovely prospect before me," Mrs. Elrington gaily observed. She was the "Mrs. Sullen" to Charlotte's "Archer". Since the audience would know no better, the company amused themselves with wild interpolations. Mrs. Elrington began it, making an unexpected entrance in the drunken scene. She took the tankard from "Scrub's" hand.

"Your health, Mr. Archer!"

"And yours, m'am." Charlotte readily played up to her.

"Scrub! Call the butler in with his fiddle that Mr. Archer and I may dance a minuet!"

The company "took a wild goose chase" through such "dramatic authors" as they could recollect—impromptu. Not



a single speech was intended to match. Charlotte, enjoying herself immensely, made "love from *Jaffier*". Mrs. Elrington reciprocated with "the soliloquy of *Cato*".

By way of finale to such incoherence, Mrs. Elrington, depriving Charlotte of Archer's closing speech, rounded off the play with "*Jane Shore's Tag*" from Act I of that tragedy. Such members of the audience as were awake, made tottering escorts of the others.

"Who," as Kitty so neatly put it, "only *dreamt* of what they should have *seen*."

### III

The company dragged on in its unsuccessful fashion, with Charlotte becoming more gloomy than ever about the prospects. When an ultimate return to Cirencester was made, she hastened to tell the reader that she had played the town before, "with Mr. Linnett's company".

Without warning, Mr. Elrington took the stage-coach to London. That—on the very evening of arrival. His wife remained to manage the company, assisted by Charlotte who, whatever her private grumbles, always showed willingness in emergency.

Being short of "Some auxiliaries" Mr. Linnett sent one of his company across to Cirencester.

Would Charlotte and Mrs. Brown join them at the "newly-erected theatre in Kingsmead Street", Bath?

"My honour is so deeply engaged in Mrs. Elrington's behalf, I cannot leave her. She is pleased to compliment me with being her right-hand."

Charlotte and the others were unaware of the reasons behind Mr. Elrington's trip to London. They regarded his wife "as an injured person". Only later did Charlotte discover that Mr. Elrington's purpose was to seek "to fix himself" with the great Mr. Rich. Elrington remained in London one season then went to Bath.

Charlotte and Mrs. Elrington followed him there. The players were reduced in number to six besides themselves.

"Our paraphernalia of the stage lacks much," Charlotte was moved to remark.

"One scene and a curtain"; and "the worst" of the Elrington wardrobe.

The plight of ever-present poverty, and having to borrow

money in order to pay carriage into the next town, grew insupportable.

"This cannot go on," Charlotte declared, in capacity of their Prime Minister.

"What do you suggest?" Mrs. Elrington was not unaware of a certain delicacy of position.

"Let us agree to support ourselves and pay the way, not only to the next town."

In this manner they collected sufficient to dismiss their waggoner without further loss of reputation!

"Now we can proceed upon fresh credit, and contract the strongest friendship that we can with each believing landlord."

The little group of players raised a genuine cheer for Charlotte. She was at the time studying the lengths of *Hamlet*, there being no one else to take the part.

"Are you not afraid to undertake such a rôle, Mama?" Kitty asked. She had, by this time, begun to respond to the courtship of an actor-manager called Harman. The gentleman was making it his business to ingratiate himself with the Elrington company.

Seeing Charlotte's *Hamlet*, Mr. Harman expressed "his appreciation".

"No man could possibly do it better because you so frequently broke out in fresh places."

Charlotte felt a curious animosity, partly because she saw how it was between Harman and Kitty.

His flattery over Charlotte's performance of "Scrub" outstripped his previous praise.

"It left a strong impression on my mind."

"You are too kind, sir," answered Charlotte, with a touch of tartness in her tone.

She knew all the signs of a love-struck girl. Kitty was manifesting them too plainly. She attended little to her work; was for ever seeking meetings with Mr. Harman and he with her.

"Is he paying his addresses to you, Kitty?"

"He wants me to marry him, Mama," was the quiet admission.

"You are a mere child!"

With patient obstinacy Kitty pointed out that unless her reckoning be at fault she was seventeen. Charlotte, having a slight vagueness as regards dates, neither agreed with nor corrected the statement.

"Have you thought well on the question of marriage?"

A quick smile came into Kitty's eyes. "Did you think well on it before you married Father?"

"What has Mr. Harman to offer?"

"A better life than this." For almost the first time that Charlotte could remember there was a trace of bitterness in her daughter's voice. Charlotte did not read in this any personal affront; indeed none was intended. But it aroused a slumbering sense of compunction in herself. Perhaps Kitty was right to seek in marriage an escape to better things.

"You are certain it is—for your happiness?"

"As certain as I am of loving him, Mama."

That shining-eyed look made Charlotte feel as if lightning had struck her across the eyes. To think that less than twenty years earlier she herself had been the same over Richard Charke. Oh, the painful disillusion of approaching forty! To reach it twice widowed, estranged from the Cibber family, without money and owning only the clothes that she pressed into service on the stage!

Perhaps because Kitty feared that at the last minute her mother might seek to prevent the match, it took place in secret. Charlotte knew, only of "the unpleasing knots being tied."

There was nothing that she could do to un-marry them, so, with sadness, she wrote the following lines in a letter, acknowledging Kitty's news:

*"I here do give him that with all my Heart,  
Which, but that he has already,  
With all my Heart I wou'd keep from him."*

#### IV

The loss of Kitty to Mr. Harman made a strange difference to Charlotte's life. It was only when she no longer had her daughter with her that she realised in full the closeness of their companionship. Seldom had they been apart since the days of Richard's desertion and Charlotte's assumption of sole responsibility for the child. Her humour, her patience, her gentle affection were so woven into the pattern of life that Charlotte felt as if she had been suddenly deprived of a limb.

"If only she had met with as sober and reasonable a creature as herself."

Charlotte saw the marriage as imprudent. Try as she did, she never brought herself to any genuine liking of her son-in-law.

Meanwhile the Elringtons were both back with their company. After playing at several towns, they arrived at "Minchin-Hampton, in Gloucestershire", to be kindly received by "the Lord of the Manor". In spite of his patronage, a warrant was issued, and put in token force against Charlotte and two others of the company.

The landlord, "privy to the plot", affected outward concern, when attempts were made to extract money from the players. The Lord of the Manor did what he could, but was unable to prevent Charlotte and two men being taken to jail.

They awaited a trial in court, but instead of having a hearing were informed that "the keeper of the prison" insisted upon their incarceration.

"'Tis only for show that we put you under lock and key."

They were held in custody for twelve hours. But for the Lord of the Manor, Charlotte did not doubt it might have been "'till Doom's-day". She was wildly indignant at this unjust treatment meted out to luckless "rogues and vagabonds" under Act of Parliament.

"I cordially desire you, my fellow prisoners, to grant me leave to cut your throats, and I will do the same by my own, if we be doomed to remain . . . after the trial."

"We are sorry to see you thus disconcerted, but decline to do your bidding! Come, keep up your spirits!"

The landlord came several times to the jail, with false promises of pending assistance. His last visit incensed Charlotte. She berated him in no mean fashion. She drew from her chequered experience, upon remarks that, in less fury, she would have declined to use.

He left, muttering. (They only saw him again the following morning, when he came to summon them "to the Hall".)

At 8 p.m. the gates were locked for the night. Charlotte offered "half a guinea apiece for beds". To no avail. However, she was acquainted with the turnkey. He was "a very good-natured fellow".

"Would you turn us into a place to lie upon the bare ground? Have us mix among the felons, whose chains rattle all night long?"

At the time there were "upwards of two hundred men and boys" in the jail. All were under "different sentences of death

and transportation". Their rags and general misery so affected Charlotte, that she turned, pleading:

"Hang us all three, rather than put us among such a dreadful crew."

The very stench of them sickened her. Nothing she had come across in all her experience of poverty and degradation equalled that.

"A couple of shoe-makers, who were imprisoned in the women's condemned-hold" were approached by the warder. Was it possible to put the three players in with them for the night? Until then, the cell had been unoccupied for a long period. One of the men was in for debt: the other, desertion, "with a design to impose his wife and children on the parish".

In comparison with the company of the felons, the condemned-hold seemed Elysium. The walls and flooring were "of flint", but when Charlotte and her two companions entered, they found the men neat and clean.

"Our bed is yours to share," offered the prisoner-for-debt, and the two actors accepted the invitation.

"We can offer you a skin, used for under leathers," the other prisoner said, addressing Charlotte.

She accepted gratefully and made for herself a dormitory. She was glad to be wearing a great coat and boots. Only the dampness of the unusual bedchamber was likely to cause her a cold.

"Since we are here for no crime, but being informed against, let us summon the turnkey and see if he will let me send for candles and some good liquor that we may reward our hosts."

"And escape the ague!"

Charlotte was still dispirited and bad tempered. However, Mr. Maxfield (one of the shoe-makers) refused to let her repine.

"I have seen you exhibit Captain Macheath in a shambling prison. Now you are actually in the condemned-hold, sing all the bead-roll of songs in the last act so that I may have the pleasure of saying you once performed in character."

"I am in no condition to be cheerful, but to please you, I will comply with your request."

This had the effect of granting her an ultimate hour of sleep, dream-tormented and restless though it proved.

With the approach of dawn she began to hope the warder would let her out into the fresh air. He came one hour in advance of his usual time and conducted them to the yard.



"These gravel-walks put me in mind of Gray's-inn Gardens, though not kept up in that regular and nice order."

After a quarter of an hour of such peaceful perambulation, the chained-felons were brought out for exercise.

"Each has his crime strongly imprinted on his visage." She noted the complete absence of remorse or shame. Disdaining pleas of mercy, they blasphemed. Charlotte, strange figure as she must have been, was moved to tears.

"What manner of pimp is this?" called one of the prisoners.

"Shut your foul mouth," cried the senior actor. "'Tis not a man, but a woman in men's clothes."

Any rush that there might have been to put this theory to test was circumvented by the turnkey coming to collect the five from the condemned-hold.

At 8 a.m. the "rogues and vagabonds" learned that they were "to appear in court at nine". Even that was a happier prospect, though there was always fear of remand. The Lord of the Manor had sent a night messenger.

"To be ready in the Sessions-House, with a large quantity of gold."

Charlotte "had not been in the pen five minutes" before being called upon "to receive a letter of comfort" for herself and her fellow players. The writer was shocked that the three should be "appearing at the bar among a set of criminals".

Their case did not take long. The informant had quitted the court before it was heard. The influence of the Lord of the Manor—and his gold—resulted in dismissal.

An official came towards them.

"I must collect half a guinea apiece from you."

"I have heard of people paying money to avoid a jail—not for going into one."

They also were being charged a guinea a head for being conducted the "twelve post—miles" of riding back into the town they had just left. Arriving, they heard that the Lord of the Manor had bespoken a play.

"We were removed out of the little town hall into the great one, which is his property," Mrs. Brown informed the released players. "Moreover, he has pledged himself to protect us from a second invasion, if it cost him half his estate."

In spite of such kind patronage, the company did not care to linger in Minchin-Hampton.

"An unlucky town for us, if ever there was one," Mrs. Elrington agreed.

"Why then tarry?"

Charlotte's question was taken up by the others. Not one of them was sad to leave the district.

v

Next autumn the Elringtons again went to act in Bath, leaving Charlotte in charge of their company for the second time. The actors were nearly persecuted in Dursley. Being on their guard in advance, they slipped into "Ross in Herefordshire, and from thence proceeded to Monmouth, in Wales."

"For so large a place, it seems difficult to obtain even a bare livelihood," was Charlotte's comment: as, their proverbial sponge sucked dry, they went on to Chepstow. There she met with several old friends and made some new ones as well. After playing at Abergavenny, she decided to leave Mr. Elrington and, indeed, retire from acting.

"I have a positive aversion for vagabondizing."

"I for one do not blame you," answered a young woman, who ranked among the new friends. "Why do you not settle in Chepstow?"

The advice seemed worthy of serious consideration.

"There is a handsome house with a large garden, consisting of nearly three-quarters of an acre, you could take."

Artlessly the young woman in Chepstow added that it was the property of her father. This worthy gentleman, after distinguishing himself on the battlefield during the reigns of "King William and Queen Anne", had retired from the service. His estate was "considerable" and his daughter sole heir to the property.

Charlotte thought about turning "pastry-cook and farmer". That she had no money never troubled her. She "took horse from Abergavenny" to call upon the young lady about the house.

"May it not prove a very inconvenient labour?" was the mild protest.

"I have a mind to try my luck that way."

Once Charlotte had decided upon a particular course of action, not even the most reasoned discussion of its probable difficulties could dissuade her.

"I fear you must be a very headstrong person."

Charlotte smiled. "That I am! Will you then forward

the repairing of the house so that it may be ready at the appointed time, for my reception?"

The easy-tempered and sincere friend, Mrs. Brown, was placidly prepared to join Charlotte in this latest venture.

"I would not involve you in needless and unnecessary difficulties. Troubles seem to be my lot."

"I shall not desert you now, my dear Charlotte."

"Be it on your own head," she answered crisply; the breeze of tone hiding an emotion she felt at being so trusted. "Let us hope it will not turn out some unaccountable farce. If it does, I shall consider myself bound in honour to ask your pardon."

Charlotte went on ahead to Chepstow. In more sober mood, she realised that though she had a house, she had neither bed nor chair with which to furnish the place! She did not allow herself to remember that tavern in London. One of the flaws in her mental process was inability to profit by experiences of the past.

"I had best seek out a place of rest." She found "a ready-furnished lodging for nights". For two weeks she walked up and down her empty house, speculating on how to furnish the place. Ultimately, by one means and another, she acquired the minimum essentials.

To set up "in pastry" demanded an oven. She had this, but not the ready money to purchase a faggot to light it. Neither had she the materials to make the pies. Undismayed, she called upon a widowed lady in the vicinity to "entreat the favour of her custom".

The widow was "a person of sense and discernment". However Charlotte had a persuasive tongue. The widow asked "all the natural and necessary questions". How did Charlotte propose to settle herself?

"I only want to make an honest and decent living."

This satisfied the widow. Still smiling, but in an indulgent fashion, she proceeded to give Charlotte the practical help required.

To baking they went and on account of local curiosity, not untinged with pity, took twenty shillings on the first day.

"Do you still call me a fool and a knave to turn my back upon the stage?"

Charlotte's grandiose ideas included the wish "to hire a large field of grass".

"Rather than a bed, I would purchase a horse to carry goods to the neighbouring markets."

Mrs. Brown, who had now joined her, felt it necessary to administer a warning against "such a mad scheme". It did not take many weeks to prove her right. Business did not merit so "chargeable" a form of delivery.

"Once everybody's curiosity is satisfied, you will see a decline in custom," Mrs. Brown observed, very gently. She had no wish to provoke the Cibber temper which, she was bound to admit, had rarely if ever been directed against herself.

"How lucky I am in my friendships," Charlotte was moved to remark. "There is the generosity of Valentine M—— from P——, who enabled me to put the main part of my furniture into my house."

"And the young woman who owns the place gave you the linen."

As one business began to fall away, Charlotte decided to supplement it with another.

"I shall buy a sow with pig."

"Mercies' sake, whatever for?" cried Mrs. Brown.

"In order that I may be a hog-merchant as well as pastry-cook."

The good lady bent to the oven so that Charlotte might not see the dismay on her face. Was there no end to the mad-cap schemes?

Charlotte procured the sow, kept it for nearly three months, optimistically expecting the beast to farrow. At last there could no longer be any question that she had not been duped.

"I' faith 'tis an old barrow!" Instead of doubling the price, she was glad to sell the sow to a butcher for "a shilling or two less" than she had paid.

"So ends my notion of being a hog-merchant!"

Mrs. Brown did not rail or say "I told you so". Quietly, and with dignity, she reminded her friend that they had "a garden well stored with fruits of all sorts".

"They can yield three guineas or more, Charlotte."

She nodded agreement, and sold from day to day, until, on rising one morning, she found the garden all but stripped.

"The vandals! The villainous wretches! Was ever woman more provoked by circumstances?"

With tears of anger, she rushed indoors to proclaim the latest disaster:



"They have torn up the good trees by the roots . . . broken the branches through fearful haste."

"One plague succeeding another," Charlotte decided that Chepstow was not lucky to her. She must move on, selling up most of the furniture to pay the local debts.

"Once more we are bedless!"

"We have still the necessary utensils for the pastry-cook's shop," Mrs. Brown reminded her.

They took leave of Chepstow and their friends, with almost a touch of regret. Though, as a venture, it had turned out no better than others, there had been something to commend the place.

## VI

They made their next headquarters at "a little place called Pill". This was "a sort of harbour for ships", five miles on the Chepstow side of Bristol. Pill proved more pleasant than did its inhabitants. Charlotte took a great dislike of the locals, calling them "beasts of prey". Boys of eight to ten years swore and blasphemed, facile "as any drunken reprobate of thirty". The amount of liquor consumed, during the summer months when the ships from Ireland were in, was prodigious.

"Bartholomew Fair was sober against this," Charlotte announced, not caring who heard the remark.

The only "reasonable creatures" were those unconcerned with boats. It struck both women as remarkable that these sober people could bear to reside amongst the riff-raff of seafarers.

Life was not always easy. Vessels became "wind bound", and crews had little means of subsistence. It was not unusual to see a sailor, half starved, stripped of most of his clothes, because he had sold them against a meal. To lack sixpence for the price of a bed, meant to be turned into the streets.

For six months Charlotte and Mrs. Brown were resident at Pill. It was an uneasy place in which to live. Having once settled there, however, removal was not so simple. They took to their beds in nightly fear of some "ill treatment before the break of day".

Yet, as it happened, they were unmolested. Charlotte rented premises and prepared to cook pastry again.

"We must set off matters in as grand a way as possible."



She had no compunction about calling herself "from London". That at least was true—though the implication that she had baked pies there was not. So the legend above the shop door was erected. Charlotte stood back, the better to admire the handiwork:

BROWN, PASTRY-COOK, FROM LONDON

## CHAPTER 14

### "PRINTER'S DEVIL"

*There is a total extinction of all taste; our authors are vulgar, gross, illiberal; the theatre swarms with wretched translations and ballad operas.*

HORACE WALPOLE *in letter to*  
*George Montagu, Esq., 1769*

#### I

Trade was good by summer at Pill, with the ships in, but almost at a standstill in the months of winter. Not surprisingly, therefore, Charlotte and her friend were soon involved in debt. For once it fell to Mrs. Brown to be the one to reach into the barren night skies and pluck down the Star of Hope.

"An uncle of mine, who died but recently, has, it seems, left me a legacy. Read for yourself," and she passed the letter to Charlotte, who immediately thought how it might be shown to the landlord. They were indebted to the extent of five and thirty shillings, and, unless some money were forthcoming, would be turned out with the same lack of humanity as was shown to such sailors as could not pay their reckonings.

So Charlotte approached the landlord with what she considered to be a most reasonable proposition. If he would "lend" her "a guinea to bear" her "charges to Mrs. Brown's aunt."

"She lives in Oxfordshire."

He made no response.

Gamely, but not with much encouragement, Charlotte argued that she could go and collect the legacy—her friend would empower her to do this—and Mrs. Brown could remain behind in the character of hostage.

"Bah! You have forged the thing between you! I be too fly to go lending such folks as you, and yon widow." He jerked a derisive finger in the direction of the inn parlour, where Mrs. Brown was nervously awaiting the outcome of this interview. "What reward would I have? The pair o' you, running away in my debt."

"Sir, you insult us! On my honour——"

"Pah!" He spat into the dust of the yard, where they were talking together.

Nothing she could say or swear upon would convince him of the truth. He only acknowledged it much later, when they actually had the money and "discharged his trifling demands". Meanwhile Charlotte, fuming, had to report failure.

"The incredulous blockhead!"

She slept on the matter and concluded that the only course was for both women to set out for Oxfordshire.

"But, we have not a groat in the world between us, Charlotte!"

There was nothing that could be pledged. Charlotte had raised half a crown on her hat, two weeks earlier in Bristol, in order to acquire ingredients for baking. Poor Mrs. Brown was "lost in wonder" at the daring enterprise before them. Ever the weaker, less self-reliant character, she abandoned herself—unwillingly—to the scheme of her headstrong companion. Yet it had to be said that whatever the disaster, Charlotte had an almost charmed way of arriving at some solution.

She appeared strangely undismayed about setting out, hatless and penniless, on a journey of eighty miles. To Mrs. Brown, such confidence was almost frightening; she should have known it to be but a front put on to reassure herself. In actual fact Charlotte was far more troubled than her manner suggested.

"I must not let her perish through my unhappy and mistaken conduct."

The two women set out from the inn before the place was astir for the day. Somewhere, quite close, a cockerel was proclaiming his lordly presence.

*"Though cheerfulness and I have long been strangers,  
Harmonious sounds are still delightful to me;  
There's sure no passion in the human soul  
But finds its food in music."*

The quotation did not strike immediate recognition in the hearer. The other upbraided her mildly.

"Why, have you forgotten Lillo's play? *Fatal Curiosity*?"

"I never played it. Only in *Sylvia*."

Mrs. Brown, stumbling on, her eyes full of tears, would have given much for Charlotte's optimism.

"Whatever world we next were thrown upon, could not be worse than Pill," Charlotte said, in tones of deceptive bravado. So unhappy did her companion appear, that by the end of

two miles Charlotte allowed her imagination to quicken to effect.

"When we are as far as Bristol, I will apply to a friend who will furnish me with a small matter to carry us on to Bath."

Bath was not Oxfordshire, but Charlotte did not think it necessary to consider thus far ahead. Early though the hour was, various neighbours from Pill were out and about the district. They could not fail to notice the hatless Charlotte and her companion, "with a bundle in her hand", which held "only a change of linen" for the journey. These well-wishers went back into Pill to acquaint the landlord with the news that the "Browns of London" were fleeing. That Charlotte was hatless was only "a blind".

Fortunately the travellers were in Bristol before anything could be done to stop them.

"Here we are safe," and smiling for the first time since setting out, Charlotte relieved her companion of the bundle.

They succeeded in procuring not only supper and a bed, but the money to take them to Bath on the morrow.

At the lodging house there was a young journeyman, with whom Charlotte dropped into a casual traveller's conversation. He was a good-natured man and obviously thought it strange that for all her smart attire, she should carry no hat upon her head. Sensing this, she said, in a casual fashion:

"I would beg the favour of you, sir. As you see, I lack a hat; mine has gone to be dressed. Dare I ask if you have one you could lend me?"

"I have one other with me, but 'tis very dusty. I have not worn it for some time."

"I would be greatly obliged to you, sir, and will restore it to you, never fear."

To her relief he said the matter was of no urgency.

At 5 a.m. Charlotte and her friend left Bristol, staying in Bath till the following morning.

"How do we pay our landlady, Charlotte?"

"That has been settled. Before we retired for the night, I pledged her my waistcoat."

In the morning, Charlotte met a Mr. Kennedy, a gentleman with his own company on the road. He was willing to help one until lately of the same fraternity. Not only did she redeem her waistcoat but acquired sufficient money for the rest of the journey.

In happier heart, they proceeded to Oxfordshire, in a matter of three days, and once there, claimed the legacy.

The return to Pill was very different from the wearisome trudge out of the village. They took "a double horse from Witney to Cirencester". For the rest, there was the occasional hay-cart or wagon in to which they gladly climbed for a rest.

Several of the "Pill gentry" were to be seen in Bristol. Their faces proclaimed their surprise.

"You thought us cheats and runaways," Charlotte cried, strong enough to make light of it—then.

They blustered and demurred. Charlotte had no doubt that the little group would have been among "the first to condemn" them.

"Make way there! I have an errand to do here in Bristol!" She swept off the borrowed hat in a low bow and offered her arm ostentatiously to Mrs. Brown. Back to the lodgings to leave the journeyman's hat against his next arrival; on to the mean little side street to redeem the hat in pledge . . .

Charlotte strode towards the inn at Pill with an air of reckless triumph.

"House there!"

The shouts and clamour brought the landlord running. His jaw dropped open. He could only stand gaping at them.

"I think you will find that's correct," and Charlotte let the gold pieces slip from her purse to his hand.

His belated apologies she treated with the contempt they deserved.

"While the money lasts, I will be the worthiest gentleman in the country." Charlotte adopted a little swagger and adjusted the angle of her redeemed hat.

Mrs. Brown looked on, with an indulgent smile. Only the sincerest of affection made it possible for her to remain companion to such a character as Charlotte. One who could act the man until it was as if she came to believe it true. The good troupier on the stage; the courageous pastry-cook; the imprudent *poseur*—and yet there was something more to her than that. Mrs. Brown had seen her, stripped of her pretences, humbled by poverty, bravely making light of hunger. She had known her, the loving, unhappy mother, fretting over Kitty's marriage. Terrified lest it prove a like disaster to her own.

"Why must you play the gentleman still?" Mrs. Brown



dared to ask. It was one of the few times she glimpsed the famous Cibber temper.

" 'Tis a matter concerning only myself."

Yet the anger was quickly gone and Charlotte repented very sweetly. Realising the fact that there were things not meant to be understood, Mrs. Brown never asked a similar question.

Their days of affluence were not lasting and before long the legacy dwindled. Finally it became exhausted. Once again they had to "contract" a "fresh score". It was only because of their past prosperity that they could do this.

"I am as much disregarded as a dead cat," said Charlotte, knowing the purse to be as empty as her own stomach had begun to feel. She had known hunger so often and over so many years that it did not bother her greatly.

Business was not good; shipping was scarce at Pill and only the prospect of another winter lay before them.

Charlotte's private discomfort was increased by the thought that she had an innocent companion in suffering.

"I meant all for the best, though it unfortunately proved otherwise."

Charlotte began to fear that they would remain in Pill until they had lost all initiative to leave. As a place it had not proved any too lucky. But move on, without money, they could not. She gave Mrs. Brown a sidelong glance and said, in a quiet voice:

"I will sit myself down and write a little tale."

This was accepted, running into two newspaper columns. Thus emboldened, she obtained an introduction to a Bristol printer. "Mr. W——d" engaged her to write for him. When "business was in a hurry" she was also to "correct the press". Though the salary was no more than "a small pittance", it was weekly.

Mr. W——d was "a man of reputation, and greatly respected". Charlotte considered him kind to have employed her. After all she was "a stranger" to whom he was under no obligation. She had, as usual, given her name as Charlie Brown and had no reason to imagine that the printer suspected her true sex.

When she was on that "long and dirty walk" back to Pill, across "Leigh-Down" (a dangerous place for anyone, even by daylight) she began to wonder whether it might not have been better to disclose her true identity.

"In that fashion he might have known how much I have it in my power to be useful to him, as well as myself."

Yet she shrank from letting her name be known. There was a remnant of pride still left in her, which made the anonymity of Charlie Brown preferable. At least Mr. W——d was satisfied that she was a person of education.

Her thoughts during those five miles of tramping were not entirely happy. Yet, once back in Pill, she hastened to tell Mrs. Brown of "the glad tidings". Compared with the normal state of existence, they must be reckoned so.

It became obvious that the walk between Pill and Bristol was going to prove not merely tiring, but hazardous, even to one in male attire.

"What reason have we still to remain in this sorry village, Charlotte?" was the reasonable question of her friend.

"None that I can see. We are but eighteen shillings indebted to our landlord. We can give up to him all we have."

They left what could be considered the equivalent of "five pounds ready money".

"If we had offered to have made a sale of it, they would have given us sixpence for that which might be worth a crown or ten shillings."

Charlotte turned the key on the pastry-shop, looking up for the last time at the gallant sign above the door. Once so fairly painted, it was now shabby from the wildness of the weather. She dropped the key into her pocket.

Three days later she sent it back to the landlord, enclosed in a note:

"... What we have left behind is entirely your own . . . we shall never more return."

Your obedient servant,  
C. BROWN."

Almost she had added, "Pastry-cook, from London."

"And I shall keep my word about going back to Pill," she spoke with a rush of conviction. Mrs. Brown, knowing her impulse almost better than Charlotte herself, asked:

"What if business or inclination should ever excite you to take a trip to Ireland?"

"I would go Chester way."

In Bristol they took lodgings "at two shillings per week". Charlotte was fortunate in having friends, who supplied invitations to meals. Otherwise the remainder of the wages would not have afforded her and Mrs. Brown more than "two good meals in a week".

As always they pooled such resources as they had. Charlotte's health, not surprisingly impaired by all the deprivations she had endured, again became a cause of slight anxiety. Too long she had abused her body, by making demands on it in excess of its stamina. Mrs. Brown, ever having "a tender regard" for Charlotte's physical well-being, bade her conserve the strength she had rather than squander it in fresh enterprises.

By the end of four weeks it became apparent to Charlotte that she could not exist, without being a doleful burden upon her friends. The printer was not willing to enlarge her salary. Indeed he had not the means to do that.

"'Tis something to piddle on—no more," she cried, with a coarseness of expression, at one time foreign to her. It did not go amiss with the character of "impoverished gentleman". Besides she had consorted so much with the dregs of humanity, that she now used words and phrases that she would not have uttered in her father's house.

That genteel life was past. She was middle-aged in years and ancient in cynical experience. There was no indignity to which she had not stooped.

No! That was not quite true! She had sold every possession, except her own body. Knowing its thin, bony lines and the way the breasts hung flat and empty-seeming on her chest, she might well question the worth that body still retained.

"'Tis close on four and twenty years since I acted at the Lane."

That, too, was a bitter thought. Those had been times of promise.

And now, what had she, except the bizarre experiences of her life to recollect?

"My poor child, Kitty, is married and lost to me."

From time to time Charlotte heard from her, but letters were dead, impersonal things. She knew that Kitty and her husband were in Wells, with their company of players.

Wells was a long way from Bristol . . .

Charlotte had not acted for several years past. Nevertheless

she decided that this offered the best way of raising a little ready money. She determined "to try for a benefit".

The printer willingly allowed her to run off bills of advertisement.

Of necessity the venture needed to be conducted "under the rose". For many years local magistrates had refused to allow plays to be acted in Bristol City.

Charlotte was well aware of the risks. With all the Cibber obstinacy she went ahead with preparations. The play selected was *Barnwell* and she arranged for its presentation in the very heart of the city: "At the Black Raven, in High Street."

The room was a large one and if promises of friends could be relied upon, would be filled twice over with patrons.

She sent to Wells for the supporting cast to Mrs. Brown and herself and it was an untold delight to see Kitty.

"My darling child!" Crying stupid, weak tears of happiness, Charlotte hugged her daughter to her in an ecstasy of reunion.

"How fares it with you, Kitty?"

"Well, dearest mother. As you see, we have our own company."

"And are you worth a comfortable sum of money?"

"You ask that?" and Kitty had to laugh.

Charlotte frowned. "I had hoped you might be well on the way to setting up in some creditable business other than the theatre."

Kitty, changing the subject a shade abruptly, began to question her parent about the coming performance.

Charlotte greeted Mr. Harman with the politeness, if not quite the cordiality, due to a tolerated member of the family. He on his part gave the slightly impertinent smile considered fitting for the reception of so eccentric a mother-in-law as one who wore the clothes of the opposite sex more frequently than those of her own.

"We are glad to be able to assist at your benefit."

"And I am grateful to you and Kitty for coming."

The size of the audience, in contrast to advance expectations, was a grave disappointment. The total takings amounted to barely four pounds, when Charlotte had hoped for five and twenty. She knew herself to be "abominably involved by the bargain" and at the curtain, marched quietly from the stage.

When she had left the Black Raven, several of the audience regretted that support had not been more generous.

"If they could make a second attempt . . ."



Charlotte was wiser than that.

Back in the lodgings she told Mrs. Brown that things were better left as they were.

"I am safe in a whole skin and would not run the chance of being a second time deceived, nor the hazard of being more deeply engaged than I am."

The morning after this "malefit", as Charlotte called it, she was obliged to ask Mrs. Brown for "the only decent gown" left to that long-suffering woman.

"Pledge it I needs must, if I am to pay the horse-hire for the players' return to Wells."

Her mortification was the greater because she could not "reward them genteely for the trouble". A fact made all the harder because of Kitty and Mr. Harman's presence.

However, the players took it in good part, luckily unaware of the means Charlotte had been forced to use in order to pay them at all. Of the things she had done to raise money, she felt disrobing Mrs. Brown to be the least fair.

When the wagon had set off for Wells, Charlotte turned back, fighting the emotion that gripped her. Now that she had seen Kitty again, she knew how greatly she was missing her. And in that, not even the loyal Mrs. Brown could help.

### III

In the end Charlotte seemed to find herself driven back to the stage. Escape its tyranny, as she tried, it was the one way in which she could be assured of work, however struggling and badly paid it might be.

This time she was influenced in her choice of company by the fact that Kitty was in Wells.

"I could go thirty miles off, a different road . . . another set of people."

She knew, however, though she disliked Kitty's husband, the yearning to be with her "child" was stronger by far than that dislike. Moreover, Charlotte had played Wells during her seasons with Mr. Elrington's company.

"We met with uncommon success," she felt bound to boast to her son-in-law, on arrival in Wells.

As much as players could expect, Charlotte had been "well regarded by the best in the town".

"Was it not the time of the small-pox that you were there?" Mr. Harman asked his mother-in-law.



"If the ladies and gentlemen had not been extremely kind, the poor exhibitors might have been glad to have shared the fate of the invalids, to have been insured of a repository for their bones."

"I, too, have found the ladies of Wells kind," Kitty acknowledged. "They have made me several valuable presents which enlarged our wardrobe considerably."

Charlotte, who had not seen Kitty act, except as an *ingenue*, was surprised at the progress her daughter had made during the past three years. What could have been more deeply affecting than the way she handled the scene in *The Roman Father*, where "Horatia" upbraids "Publius" "for the murder of her lover"? Only one who loved could have played it so, thought Charlotte.

Kitty gave her mother "equal delight" as *Boadicea*.

"I should never have suspected such merit from one of your uncultivated genius."

Among players of the time the word genius was apt to be bandied with mammoth lack of discretion!

Good though the girl could be in dramatic rôles, her mother still liked best to see her in low comedy.

"'Twas in comedy your grandfather used to excel . . . your uncle, Theophilus, too."

Charlotte had heard of neither for so long that their names came strangely from her lips. Kitty, understanding this so well, put an arm about her parent.

"Grandfather still ignores your existence?"

"To him, 'tis as if I am already dead."

"Surely Uncle Theophilus——"

"Ah! Theophilus!" Charlotte smiled fleetingly. Her brother was in as many financial scrapes as herself, though his were mostly in London, whilst hers were far beyond it, in the country.

"Do you ever wish yourself back in London, Mama?"

"At times—but not now, when we are together again, dearest child."

Charlotte remained with the Harman company for the run of six towns. The last but one was Honiton. While there Charlotte received an unexpected letter from Theophilus. When he was able, he certainly did what he could to put her in the way of work.

". . . Mr. Simpson of Bath has a mind to engage you, dear Charlotte, to prompt, and undertake the care of the stage, incident to that office . . ."

Theophilus's letter provided the excuse to leave the company which otherwise Charlotte might have found hard to engineer. She was "heartily tired of strolling" and the delicate relationship between herself and Mr. Harman had deteriorated into marked antipathy.

"Not only is he impertinent to me, but to you, also."

"I do not mind, Charlotte," protested Mrs. Brown, the peaceful. "Do you not wish to remain with Kitty?"

"With Kitty—yes. With that little insignificant—no!"

"Since you are so determined to leave them, the offer of Mr. Simpson gives you good reason."

Mr. Harman gave a slightly sarcastic smile when he learned that he was to be relieved of his mother-in-law and her friend. He did not say that he would miss either of them.

Kitty wept a little at thoughts of parting from her mother, but marriage had brought fresh loyalties.

"Had Kitty begged me to stay—who knows——"

But Kitty had not done so. She deplored having to say good-bye, but doubtless would have regretted still more distressing her husband. He had made it clear that Charlotte and Mrs. Brown were there because he believed their presence pleased Kitty, irksome though he often found it himself.

They were good troupers both, but he did not care for the Cibber temper—or temperament. To Kitty he did not disguise the lack of esteem he had for her mother. Though it saddened Kitty that it had to be so, she could not, in all honesty, wonder at his opinion.

"Someone wrote a poem about her once," Kitty said, trying to recall a few of the lines. The verses had begun by stating how Charlotte had been used by Colley:

*"... As children use a fav'rite toy;  
Indulg'd, neglected, fondled and abused.  
... Thoughtlessly rear'd, she led a thoughtless life."*

Kitty began to recite the terrible words aloud, as if the pain of their truth were hard to bear.

*"And she so well beloved became most hated;  
A helpless mother, and a wife unblest."*

Passing womanhood "in strife" and "wand'ring in disquietude for bread".

## CHAPTER 15

### PROMPTER

*"But pray, says he, you that are a Critick, is the play according to your Dramatick Rules, as you call them? Should your People in Tragedy always talk to be understood? Why, there is not a single Sentence in this Play that I do know the Meaning of."*

THE SPECTATOR, 1711  
Joseph Addison

#### I

The name of Cibber was still something to impress. Not everyone shared the view of Horace Walpole that:

"Cibber wrote bad odes, but then, Cibber wrote *The Careless Husband*, and his own life, which both deserve immortality."

There were those who leaned closer to the splenetic phrases by Pope, in his *Dunciad*, where Colley was raised to Laureate of the great Empire of Dullness. "Sinking from thought to thought, a vast profound!" and "In pleasing memory of all he stole," to make but "prose on stilts" and "poetry fall'n lame".

But to Mr. Simpson, of Bath, even the name of Theophilus had weight. That was why Mr. Simpson received Mistress Charke with deference and a "gentleman-like manner".

Knowing that her brother had recommended her under her own name, Charlotte forswore masculine attire for the occasion. Mr. Simpson saw a tall, gaunt-cheeked woman, of impressive stature, with hair greying, and lines of care about the lips and eyes. Her voice, well modulated and clear, was of deep quality for a woman.

Charlotte explained that she and her travelling companion had come straight to Bath, leaving the Harman company behind them. It was obvious that Charlotte was desperately in need of money "to equip" her in "proper character". Mr. Simpson made her a loan, which she was to repay weekly out of salary.

"I am greatly obliged to you, sir."

He was struck by the queer dignity that transcended her shabbiness and made reception of his loan a matter of graceful condescension rather than direct solicitation.

Mr. Simpson that night took up his quill and wrote a note addressed to "Theophilus Cibber, Esq.", telling him of having engaged Mistress Charke as suggested.

"I am grateful, sir, to you for arranging for your sister to join me . . ."

Theophilus, pleased, and at the same time amused at the pomposity, wrote another brief line to Charlotte.

"Am I to conclude, dear Charlotte, that you are once again clothed in the garb of your rightful sex? . . ."

He made mention of Brett Marples, whom he had seen more recently than Charlotte had, and added—gratuitously—that none of them were growing any younger.

Charlotte soon discovered that though Mr. Simpson was "owner", he was not "master of the house". As she said to Mrs. Brown:

"His good nature, and unwillingness to offend the most trifling performer make him give up his right of authority . . . when he ought to have exerted it."

Though Mr. Simpson's rooms "were more methodically conducted than his theatre", between attempting to look after both, he succeeded in ordering neither. His "government" often provoked "anarchy and uproar". The players "had their several wills", and Charlotte was "bound to obey them all."

Not unnaturally she found her task difficult, besides uncongenial. She had no wish to offend anyone:

"Though they herd in parties," she told Mr. Simpson, "I am resolved to be a stranger to their disputes till open quarrels oblige me to listen."

Her rôle was often that of "porter, to set these matters to rights". She tried to do so with fairness. The one person to whom she always could complain, without fear of offence, was the faithful Mrs. Brown.

"Because of my father, as well as having been on a much better footing in a superior theatre, I do not care to be treated so."

"The place fatigues you, Charlotte. If you let it, it will become more than your health or spirits can support."

She laughed without mirth. "I am certain the prompters of either theatre in London have not half the Plague in six months, that I have had in as many days."

"Not even Sunday can you call your own."

If anything, the Sabbath was busier than a weekday. Charlotte would leave "fresh orders" at the house for Mr. Bodely, the printer, even while he was at church. There seemed to be everlasting changes in the cast and "of capital distinctions in the bills, without which very indifferent actors would not otherwise go on".

"I have often thought," Charlotte observed to her friend, "that instead of the word performed, it should be writ deformed."

"You think of the brace of heroes?" and Mrs. Brown smiled in sympathy. "We shall never see their like again!"

Charlotte, lying on the bed, resting after one of her rushing errands to Mr. Bodely, judged Miss Ibbott, the leading lady, really deserving "of praise and admiration".

"Most particularly do I like her in the part of 'Isabella' in *The Fatal Marriage*. Not only does she draw attention from the audience, but she moves them to commiserating tears."

Indeed, Charlotte herself had been so affected by this particular performance that had a prompt been demanded, she doubted her ability to speak the words. Luckily for her, Miss Ibbott always knew the lines to perfection.

"I am very certain there are several people of quality down at Bath, who can testify the truth of what I have said of her."

Mrs. Brown, who was not expected to comment, merely nodded agreement.

"I think the masters of either of the theatres"—Covent Garden and Drury Lane—"could take her merit into consideration. And if she could but see my sister-in-law, Susannah Cibber, Peg Woffington or Mrs. Pritchard, in their different lights, Miss Ibbott could become as complete an actress as ever trod the English stage."

That audiences shared this view was demonstrated by the dropping of receipts at performances where Miss Ibbott did not appear. A fact that led to not a little envy and back-biting from the rest of the cast.

From the September to March that Charlotte was with Mr.



Simpson, business was voted better than during earlier seasons. The presence of "the justly-celebrated Mr. Maddox", engaged "at a considerable salary" was an additional draw to Miss Ibbott. Yet he, too, occasioned "private murmuring".

"They profit by his success, and grudge it at the same time," Charlotte exclaimed. But even jealousy amongst "the comedians" could not kill their delight at Mr. Maddox's "surprising feats of activity on the wire".

"I am engaged to perform at Mr. Hallam's Wells, in Goodmans Field at Whitsuntide," he told Charlotte, as the two conversed together off stage. "I intend to entertain the town with several new things, never yet publicly exhibited."

"I hope that you will be constantly visited by all people of true taste."

Soon after Maddox left Bath, trouble arose with regard to the running of the two local theatres. Information was laid against Mr. Simpson's playhouse by "an old scoundrel" anxious to make easy money. Mr. Simpson rallied his Orchard Street company and made the inevitable announcement:

"This means we must close the theatre."

They were idle about three weeks in all, during which period the business was made public. It seemed that out of the evil lasting good might come. Future attempts by informers would be unsuccessful in Bath.

Being what Charlotte called "the seat of pleasure for the healthful, and a grand restorative for the sick", Bath was a place of privilege. The suppression of any "innocent diversion"—in this case, the playhouse—was considered an affront to "the people of quality". Public indignation was great, when it was discovered that "a certain A . . ." had raised "many guineas" to bribe the "old knave" to inform against the players. People saw such an action as "an infringement upon their liberty of entertainment".

During the suspension period, Charlotte was continuously accosted by people of the town, anxious to discuss the matter with her. Some said that they could not bear to think of "the misfortunes of the poor show-folk".

Others pledged: "We will interest ourselves on behalf of each theatre—you have our promise."

There were some, of course, who saw in the ban "an end put to prophanation and riot".

The cloak of virtue under the guise of religion most provoked Charlotte to angry expostulation.

"Have we not thousands of fine gentlemen, regularly bred at universities, who understand the true system of religion? And are not the churches hourly open to all who please to go to them?"

She found the people of Bath "inconsistent with the rules of reason and sense".

"If public devotion, four times a day, is not sufficient for that torrent of goodness, they would be thought to have, their private prayers at home, offered with sincerity and penitence, they may be assured will be graciously received."

She saw them as a "swarm like wasps in June", leaving a sting "in the minds of many".

Though Charlotte was "heartily tired" of her work with Mr. Simpson, nevertheless she had intended to remain with him until the finish of the season. The closing of the theatre made her reconsider this decision. Not only did cessation of work mean "some guineas" out of her "pocket", but there was the element of uncertainty about the possibility of re-opening. In the circumstances she felt justified in leaving.

"I have had several ill-natured rebuffs from the lower part of the company, which I scarce thought worth my notice," she told Mr. Simpson, when handing in her notice. "That was not of great importance . . ."

"Why, then, Mrs. Charke, can you not remain with us longer? We shall re-open, I promise."

"I find myself sorely fatigued. The work is more proper to be undertaken by a man than a woman."

Warming to her subject, she said there was another thing she "took monstrously ill".

Mr. Simpson knew it was the question of "Lord Foppington" in *The Careless Husband*.

Some people, who had seen her acting in London, suggested she should, at their request, give a performance in her father's old play and part; one which Theophilus also had acted with some distinction. Watching her at rehearsal was seemingly an extra inducement for "bespeaking" the play.

Mr. Simpson was approached in the matter. He might have been agreeable, had not two members of the company opposed the scheme. According to Charlotte, both of them wanted to play "Foppington".

"Whether together or separately, I know not. And neither knows a word of French."

She was told that Mr. Simpson was supposed to have been

enjoined, by Theophilus, never to let her go on the stage, especially in the character of "Lord Foppington". Charlotte now taxed the manager with the whole sorry business.

"I believe the town has had too many proofs of my brother's merit, to suppose it possible for me to be vain enough to conceive I should eclipse it by my performance, or that he would be weak enough to fear it."

"Fear it, no."

"I am angry with myself for ever condescending to sit behind the scenes to attend a set of people who—Miss Ibbott excepted, are incapable of judging such faults in acting as I may have."

Mr. Simpson was polite, regretful, and in a way understanding. She had let him see the work was uncongenial. Apart from Miss Ibbott, and two male members of the company, she had made no friends.

"I hate going to the house as some people do to undergo a course of nauseous physick," she recounted the interview in detail round at the lodgings.

"Soon we shall have quit Bath, Charlotte," was Mrs. Brown's gentle reminder.

Before they actually left "a malicious aspersion" was cast upon Charlotte. The indignation this aroused in her was comical, considering the past, but none the less genuine.

"Have you heard the monstrous thing they say? That I have to leave Bath, because I have designed to forsake my sex again and have been positively seen in the street in breeches!"

"An impertinent falsehood," agreed Mrs. Brown, not daring to smile, lest she gave offence. Poor Charlotte! Only six or seven months earlier she still had been "Charlie Brown". Now, when she had honestly and truly taken up rightful identity and clothes again, they sought to push her into the wayside mud by saying she still aped the male.

As was later discovered, the rumour was carried by an actress to London and made the cause of yet more strife amongst the members of the Cibber hierarchy.

"'Twas delivered to my father as a reality."

No wonder that Charlotte's hatred of Bath grew in retrospect.

"I would not undertake such office again, if it were for ten guineas per week."

She did not go any further away than Bradford-on-Avon. There she and Mrs. Brown joined a company which was rated by both as "the most deplorable set of non-performers". They had "not a wig and a half" amongst them and it was doubtful whether the men owned more shirts. Business was almost extinct.

"We have been so long a stranger to money that we have almost forgot the current coin of our country," one of the crowd announced.

Anything seemed preferable to the atmosphere prevailing in Bath. So tired was Charlotte, that she asked no more of life than to sit down and rest.

"Why should I repine for the short time I intend to stay with them?"

News came that "a young man at Bath" was anxious to see what he could do as *Othello*. The out-of-work "comedians", in no position to quibble at an amateur's performance, however bad it might prove, were glad of anything in the way of work.

"He has brought us a good house and we can eat!"

The Bradford landladies smiled once more and the acting Fraternity dared to voice a modest request, without knowing in advance—as had been the case during the preceding fortnight—that the answer was likely to be "No".

"Are we ever to be paid?" the landlady's looks had asked.

Now, in receipt of a little of what was due, they could afford to be more humane.

So disjointed a company could not long keep together and in a matter of days they "herded in parties". Mrs. Brown and Charlotte joined another manager. After starvation diet for 'two or three towns', they reached Devizes. The entire company consisted of the manager—"rich and wise" as the one left in Bradford—his wife and one young fellow.

"We shall play here," the manager stated, with ill-seeming bravado.

"Not with us in the cast."

Charlotte had had more than sufficient. Without "a farthing in the world" she sold "a few trifling things for four shillings".

"We will set out to rejoin Kitty."

Mrs. Brown's face blanched. "They are forty miles away from us!"

Unfeelingly Charlotte stated her plans. They would set out



from Wiltshire across Salisbury Plain, to "Romsey in Hampshire".

"'Tis madness; madness! Have you thought that there are no houses over that long, solitary walk, allowed to receive travellers?"

"We shall go under the plain through all the villages."

"And lengthen our journey by twenty further miles!"

The first night's expenses for "lodging and supper, came to ninepence".

"Which leaves no more than three shillings and three pence to support us for sixty miles. Oh Charlotte, why did we leave Bath? Miss Ibbott, Mr. Faulkner, Mr. Gifford and many more of Mr. Simpson's comedians came to see *The comical humours of the Moor of Venice* at Bradford, and begged us to return."

"That I might have agreed to, had I not taken offence at something said——"

Mrs. Brown bit her lip, not for the first time wishing that Charlotte were a greater stranger to umbrage.

"Perhaps my mind was peevish—even so, I do not repent, but rather pity my successor."

As the two women trudged along what seemed to be the interminable road to nowhere, Charlotte wondered—as she had outside Devizes, where she had debated for an hour—whether after all they should not have been walking to London rather than Hampshire. Their finances were equally capable of serving them to either place. But she knew that it was the thought of Kitty that decided the route. And the knowledge that she was to see Kitty again kept her going when every ache in her body made her want to sink by the roadside and die. Mrs. Brown, being sustained by no such quest, perhaps underwent the greater hardship of the two.

How intolerable they were, those three days of semi-starvation. The travellers had to pick their way "through intricate roads" and their plight was made worse by the "terrible showers of rain".

Neither woman had been bred to such rigours, yet circumvented them in the manner of true gipsies. In the extreme heat of the daytime they stopped at some clear-running stream. There, cupping their hands, they drank thirstily of the water. Once or twice they dipped their sore and swollen feet, chancing that they would be able to resume their worn shoes. But the pleasure of coolness against the burning skin made such a risk worth the taking.



They rested in the shadow of hedges, talking little, reserving the strength in them until they must continue the "tedious, painful march". They saved what money they could in this way. They had enough to pay their nightly dues at "the friendly inn". There their weariness completely overcame them in a sleep that was forgetful of care.

Their last three halfpence went on a five-mile ride in the wagon that bore them into Romsey. Kitty received her mother with all the old affection.

"And this time I can call you so in public, since you are dressed as a woman."

Charlotte had sold her suits during the last difficult months and the decision to remain in woman's attire was more or less settled for her.

Lately Charlotte had taken up her pen again.

Already the third of her plays had been produced, *Tit for Tat or the Comedy and Tragedy of War*, albeit at one of the small theatres. She was at work upon a novel, *The History of Henry Dumont, Esq.*

"I think I can easily finish it during the weekly publication. I am determined not to lead this uncomfortable kind of life any longer."

"You do not intend to tarry with us, Mama?"

"Only for a short while."

At Newport, Isle of Wight, Charlotte assured both her son-in-law and Kitty that she was not going further with them. Either they did not, or would not, believe her.

"I tell you what is true! I promise to make you both happy with such money as I make with my writing."

Mr. Harman took this as a personal injury. Perhaps it suggested an inability to keep his wife in normal comfort. Charlotte's temper began to rise to danger-level.

"I swear I intend to turn the reward equally to your account and my own."

She could only suppose that there was lack of understanding on Harman's side, while Kitty was letting marital obedience lead her into "error".

"Notwithstanding my aversion to the choice of husband you have made, Kitty, I am still your mother. No duty of a wife can exempt you from what you owe me."

Kitty, torn as she was in contrary directions, could only remain in unhappy silence.

Already there was dissension in the air. The old, close

relationship between mother and daughter had vanished. Harman's wishes and his decisions were made without allowance for any tenderness between parent and child. He saw Charlotte as impossible: a disrupting influence on his theatrical company and the cause of unhappiness in his wife.

He made it clear that, having married him, Kitty must place him first. And continue to do so, whatever the distress occasioned thereby. Charlotte recognised this more closely than Kitty herself.

"The child was ever a meek soul. She has none of my independence of spirit."

Independence of spirit did not necessarily mean happiness. Though Charlotte disliked admitting it, she saw Kitty was still very much in love with her husband: and he with Kitty.

"As much as it be in a man to love faithfully."

Indirectly fears of smallpox accelerated the parting. One of the company, nervous of possible contagion, suggested joining forces with Charlotte. They crossed to Lymington, on the mainland.

"'Twas here my daughter enslaved herself for life," was the maternal comment.

From Lymington to Fareham, where Mr. Harman appeared, under pretext of "bringing over some hands to help" them. (The little company was only six strong.) For a moment or two Charlotte felt gratitude for her son-in-law's action. Soon, however, she became aware of its underlying craft. He came—not to bring hands, but to take two of the existing ones from her.

"This is the finish," Charlotte cried, white-faced with anger. "Never more shall I set my foot on a country stage."

"Then I have done you some service after all," Mr. Harman dared to remark. As she saw it, "insolent to the last."

"That you could behave so—to me! I know my poor child would be no party to depriving her mother of the morsel of bread she struggled for, were it not for her cursed obedience to an inconsiderate fool!"

Not only was Charlotte in difficulties as the result of her son-in-law's action, but so was the manager by whom she was engaged. When Mr. Harman had gone and she was calm enough to think again, she turned to the young gentleman in question.

"Steer your course to London."

"How can I do that, Mrs. Charke? There is not only myself, but my wife and child to provide for."

So strenuously did Charlotte urge him to go there that she felt it beholden upon herself "to contrive the means". She applied to a friend of the young man's, who gave quite generously, and away they went to Portsmouth.

"Pray heaven we are in time for the waggon which sets out this day."

They were not and had to tarry two days—almost a financial disaster, considering how slender their joint resources were. But things could have turned out worse.

Nothing could equal the feeling of exaltation which gripped Charlotte as she climbed into the waggon.

Nine long, empty-seeming years had she been away from London. And as Etherege said in *The Man of Mode*:

"Beyond Hyde Park all is a desert."

## CHAPTER 16

### LAST STAGE OF ALL

*(Taking bird) Julia: "Come, my pretty, let your mistress feed you, I love you very much." (She feeds it.)*

SPOILT CHILD (*Dramatic Dialogues*)  
by Mrs. Pritchard, 1792

#### I

"Goodmorrow. I am glad, sir, to see you looking so well," and Horace Walpole hailed Colley Cibber on the morning of his birthday in 1755.

"Egad, sir, at eighty-four it's well for a man that he can look at all!"

And Colley passed on, a little stooping in his gait and the sound of his voice thinner and more squeaky than Walpole had recollected.

The house in Berkeley Square was a fine, genteel building; giving pride to its master. He smiled, well-pleased with himself as he addressed the bell. The servant opened to him and he hobbled across the hall, wishing that the gout would not give him so many unnecessary twinges. He settled in his chair, to read the letters of congratulation and to receive the presents which his eldest daughter had opened in readiness. He clucked with his teeth, wishing she had left the task to him.

"I would have you know I am not quite the dodderer yet. I may have one foot in the grave, but, demme, not both of them!"

He looked at this daughter, advanced far into the sixties and a living reminder of his august age. The irascible expression did not soften.

"Anything from Theophilus?"

"Yes, Father."

He read his son's note, not ill-pleased with the sentiments expressed. Theophilus was a disappointment, of course, but the fellow had a good heart.

"The Marples have sent—and your granddaughter, Jane—"

"I would see her letter next, I thank ye."

He felt grateful that neither of the daughters of Theophilus

had done anything to merit their grandfather's displeasure. Or to cause him "to elbow them out of his favour".

"Susannah sends a new snuff box . . ."

The old man smiled, pleased at this thought from his famous daughter-in-law.

There were many other letters and gifts from those who had known him in the theatre, but he was tired; a little fretful even and said:

"Later, later! I would be left awhile."

When his daughter had gone he stretched out his toes towards the crackle of the November fire. The faggots burned well and the cold air seemed to lend a crispness to the flames.

"'Tis good to be remembered on this day," Colley observed, then sighed. All his family were ready to do obeisance to the grand old man of the theatre. All, except one—Charlotte.

He knew that she was back in London, living in heaven knew what state, somewhere on its outskirts. She had taken to writing, and he was not too sure that he approved of her publishing that narrative of her life. There were things that might be better left unsaid.

"Falsehoods and follies . . ." he muttered to himself, as he had come to do in his extreme old age.

It was eight months earlier that she had had the effrontery to communicate with him. "Saturday, 8 March, 1755." He remembered the date. She had sent her ridiculous letter by "a young lady", acting as messenger.

"Honour'd Sir," the note had begun.

Charlotte acquainted him with the publication of "the first number" of the narrative of her life. Though she did not tell her father so, the idea had been at the instigation of friends. They also pressed for her to enlarge the account so that it might appear in pocket volume form as well. The letter had continued:

"... in which I made a proper concession in regard to those unhappy miscarriages which have for many years justly deprived me of a father's fondness."

"She knew the fault to be hers," Colley reminded himself, unwilling to admit—even in solitude—that there could have been a sharing of the blame. Whilst acknowledging these "youthful follies", she had the idea of "suing" for her father's "blessing and pardon".



"And in public, demme! In public!" How had the letter gone on?

". . . Be assured, Sir, I am perfectly convinced I was more than much to blame . . ."

"The headstrong baggage! Making odium of the name of Cibber."

It was the last paragraph that stuck in his memory, as a barb in the side of a mettlesome horse:

"I shall, with your permission, sir, send again to know if I may be admitted to throw myself at your feet; and, with sincere and filial transport, endeavour to convince you that I am,

Honour'd Sir,  
Your truly penitent  
and dutiful daughter,  
CHARLOTTE CHARKE."

For a weak moment—but only a moment—he had allowed himself to consider opening the door of his house again to her. If she *was* as penitent as she would have him believe . . . Then he remembered her haughty demeanour on the last occasion they had been together. Not a single demand put to her would she accept.

His eldest daughter had come into the room and stood waiting, cold, implacable, shrivelled in spinsterhood, with a rat-trap of a mouth . . .

"What answer, Father, is there to Charlotte's letter?"

Colley had felt those appraising eyes on him, threatening, defying him to do what his heart suggested.

"Only this." His mind made up, he had placed the letter inside a blank sheet of paper.

## II

When the messenger had handed this cruel answer—if answer it could be called—back to Charlotte, it was obvious that the hurt went deep. Excusing herself hurriedly, she went away "so dreadfully disconcerted" that it was hard to hide the extent of her distress.

"The prodigal, according to the Holy writ, was joyfully

received by the offended father . . . mercy has even extended itself at the place of execution . . ." Was there nothing, "but my life could make atonement?"

No temper gripped Charlotte, only an enervating despair that ended in the old familiar fever. This time there was no Mrs. Brown to nurse her. They had parted, at long last, not without a certain unwillingness on both sides. Mrs. Brown preferred to stay on in the country. For Charlotte the heart-break of London was to be preferred.

She had returned, "with only a single penny" in her pocket and gravitated finally to a habitation, no better than a pitiful thatched hovel. It was "on the way to Islington" in the purlieus of Clerkenwell and Bridewell, without being far distant "from the New River Head". This unsavoury neighbourhood was where the scavengers unloaded their muck.

So glad was she to be away from "the impertinent power of travelling-managers" that almost any situation appeared preferable. And she had known poverty and squalor for so long that, as with Cæsar, it was "inter'd within her bones".

"I doubt not but there are numbers of my former fellow-sufferers—on the stage—who are of my opinion."

Therefore Charlotte was applying herself "closely" to her pen. With that, and "an annual benefit", she hoped to survive such hardships as remained to her.

So what had begun by being "a trifling sketch", introduced "in the preface" of *Mr. Dumont's History*, had been expanded into *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke*. There had been a large demand for the weekly numbers "throughout England and Wales". The subsequent volume, brought out by "W. Reeve, in Fleet Street", went into its second edition the same year.

So she proposed to make her pen at least partly her support. She was aware that "slips of the press" had crept into the accounts she had written, but A. Dodd, the printer, was much occupied with the great concern of "Benefits at both the theatres". When the managements of Covent Garden and the Lane commanded, printers were apt to obey, even to the extent of neglecting less valuable clients.

Not a little tired, Charlotte thought her friends and public would excuse such errors.

"I shall always endeavour to render my pen as an amusement to my readers, as far as my capacity extends."

During the April and May of 1755, therefore, the narrative

had come out in weekly parts before going to the bound edition.

In the text of the narrative, Charlotte had made mention of the completion of *The History of Henry Dumont, Esq., and Miss Charlotte Evelyn*. The fact did not escape the quizzing eye of one, Samuel Whyte "of Dublin". He was by way of being an editor of literary matters and had a turn for poetry as well.

In the autumn of that same year he collected a business associate of his—"Mr. H. Slater, Jun., of Holborn Bars." They made a curious pair. The elegant amateur, and wary haberdasher of literature (or young publisher), Slater.

"Let us go and seek out Mistress Charke," was Whyte's suggestion.

Neither had expected "to find so extraordinary seat of the Muses" as existed at Clerkenwell. Rain had been heavy the night before the gentlemen's visit, and the ooze and slush of the refuse dump presented a picture of singular unpleasance. Mr. Whyte raised his kerchief to his nose, made aware of odour as well as mud. Mr. Slater looked at him inquiringly. Should they turn back towards the town and not pursue the mission?

Having come thus far, Mr. Whyte was of the opinion they should proceed. He picked his way to the everlasting detriment of his white stockings.

"We are in mud to the very calves, Slater."

"Well, sir, it could be said that our legs give the appearance of being clad in the fashionable style of half-boots."

Mr. Whyte surveyed the rotting wood of the door. To attempt to pull the latch string seemed to him to invite possible demolition, therefore he knocked. He had an eye that missed no less than his sensitive nose.

The door was opened to them by "a tall, meagre, ragged figure, with a blue apron, indicating what might else have been doubted, the feminine gender".

Mr. Whyte could not help casting the lady mentally for "the Copper Captain's tattered landlady" in *Rule a Wife*.

"Mistress Charke?" he inquired, fastidiously hoping that it might not be.

The woman shook her head. "With a torpid voice and hungry smile" she requested them to step inside.

Mr. Whyte's eye went first to the dresser. He noted—with mild condescension—that it was clean. It had on its shelves "three or four coarse delft plates: and underneath an earthen pipkin, and a black pitcher with a snip out of it".

To his right was Charlotte. She was seated upon what he would describe as a maimed chair, under the mantelpiece, by a fire merely sufficient to put a body in mind of starving. On one hob "sat a monkey". It began to chatter as they appeared. On the other hob was a tabby cat of melancholy aspect which did not even trouble to miaow. At Charlotte's feet, lying on the very flounce of her "dingy petticoat", was a skeleton-like dog.

Mr. Whyte, telling of his visit later, said:

"He raised his shagged head, and, eagerly staring with his bleared eyes, saluted us with a snarl." Used, no doubt, to bailiffs and other unwelcome visitors!

Her hand, well-shaped and strong, stretched down to the dog's neck.

"Have done, Fidele! These are friends."

The gentlemen, who had expected the tone of her voice to be harsh, were surprised because it was not. It had in it something "humbled and disconsolate: a mingled effort of authority and pleasure". That there should be authority still, Mr. Whyte found remarkable.

His heart filled with pity to Charlotte, a woman whose deep voice retained something of music, even in adversity.

"Of course," he recollected, "she acted on the stage."

He found it difficult to hazard her age. He would have taken her at first for fifty or possibly more. Yet it seemed to him that Colley Cibber's last child had been born about 1714: in which case she would be no more than one and forty.

The planes of her face showed refinement: even of passably good features. But the ravages of hunger and a recent bout of fever had drawn in her cheeks; lent shadow to her eyes.

On "the top rung of her chair" perched a magpie.

What a strange collection of pets, even for so eccentric an authoress to have collected! The magpie at least was a comely ornament. The others, Mr. Whyte felt, were not.

In Charlotte's lap was "a mutilated pair of bellows". The pipe was missing. The bellows now served "as a succedaneum for a writing desk". On it Mr. Whyte could see the pages filled with her not unimpressive handwriting.

The work which he and young Slater had come to see.

For inkstand she used "a broken tea-cup". Her only pen was "worn to a stump".

"The settle"—Charlotte addressed the gaunt servant, as Mr. Whyte took the woman to be.



"A rough deal board, with three hobbling supporters," was placed before the gentlemen. They "contrived" to seat themselves, the better to attend to the business which had brought them to New River Head.

After a preliminary cough, Mr. Whyte said that he understood Mrs. Charke had a manuscript for sale.

She gave a sudden, transforming smile, as if the hope of a little money held unbearable sweetness.

"You have come to discuss publication?"

Subject to finding the work satisfactory, they had.

"Would you care that I should read the book to you, gentlemen?"

They agreed. Taking up the first sheet, Charlotte began in a quiet, clear tone, lending an emphasis here, a pause there, which brought the words to greater life.

Mr. Whyte was sufficiently sorry for her to wish for a purchase, whatever the merit. That the quality was good, as it proved, he found almost a relief. At least it was not greatly inferior to "the narrative".

When Charlotte had done, certain remarks were made by the visitors, and alterations agreed. Rather cautiously she was sounded upon the price she expected.

"Thirty guineas." She spoke the words with a kind of desperate bravado. She had been beaten down so often in bargaining that she no longer had reason to hope even for a fair exchange in barter. But there was a certain degree of face still to be saved.

"Five pounds," offered the bookseller.

Charlotte did not appear offended. "Disappointments had rendered her mind callous." However, she had to make at least a struggle to better terms, and—"some altercation ensued."

All this while the listening "hand-maiden" was stretching her neck, anxious to know what sum of money might be agreed.

"Heaven alone can tell what she is owed," thought Mr. Whyte.

Though secretly contemptuous of the poor, as behoved an eighteenth-century man of substance, Mr. Whyte did not feel his friend was being just in offering so low a figure as five pounds for the manuscript.

The "tonelessness" and "the utter absence of surprise or indignation" in Charlotte's conventional protest affected Mr.



Whyte strongly. He could not willingly see her exploited through her hunger. Aware of sentimentality instead of business acumen, he said:

"I offer to double your five pounds, Slater, and take half the risk of the publication."

"I wish to have fifty copies of the book for myself, gentlemen."

"To that we agree, marm."

Only completion of the transaction remained to be carried out: this did not take long. Charlotte rose, revealing greater height than they had expected. Her clothes, like her person, were clean.

"I am grateful to you, gentlemen." She turned to the woman, indicating that the visitors should be conducted off the premises.

The two men squelched back in the mire, in silence. Mr. Slater carried the manuscript beneath his arm.

"And that," he said at last, in a kind of wondering disbelief, "was really old King Coll's daughter?"

### III

Two years later, contemporary publications recorded the news that, on the 11th day of December 1757 "there died at his house in Berkeley Square, Colley Cibber, Esq., Poet Laureate."

As became so long-lived and famous a personage, a funeral of pomp and pageantry was carried out in Westminster Abbey. Solemnly were intoned the words of Psalm 90:

*"... and though men be so strong that they come to fourscore years ..."*

The congregation were moved amongst themselves by the thought that Cibber had achieved the great age of six and eighty. They were there: his children. Theophilus, middle-aged and lending support to his eldest sister who, when the time had come, felt with keenness the death of the father she so long had ruled. Beside her the grand-child, Betty, who had lived with her aunt at No. 20 Berkeley Square.

"There, Grandpa died in his sleep."

But Theophilus thought only that Charlotte should have been present. Whatever the family estrangements, it was

not kind that she be deprived of the last right of any son or daughter: that of paying respect to the body of their father.

Theophilus let his eye pass over the assembly, so correct in all the outward manifestations of grief. He felt a curious distaste. This was not real! They came from deference, not affection. These people had not *loved* Colley Cibber in his lifetime. They had feared him and mocked at his jingling verses. Unwillingly Theophilus remembered those lines of *Dunciad* which were best forgotten:

*"Loud thunder to its bottom shook the bog,  
And the hoarse nation croaked, 'God save King Log!'"*

A muffled weeping made him turn. He saw his other daughter, Jenny, touch her eyes with her handkerchief.

"*Did the child care for the old man then?*" . . . Later, he heard a voice of unctuous majesty, calling Colley "our dear brother here departed".

At length the service was over; Theophilus stood to one side, exchanging only a polite nod with his much-wronged wife, Susannah. Yet in her expression on this day at least there was no censure: only pity.

Outside the Abbey the crowd began to disperse, by carriage and on foot. Colley's eldest daughter caught at the arm of Theophilus.

"Are you not coming back to the house?"

"I am going to see Charlotte," he said, aware of the quick red flush of annoyance in her cheek.

"That you can mention her—on this—of all days!"

"Have you forgotten that once, before you and others began your metting, she was our father's favourite? And now she is not even good enough to follow his coffin."

Without another word, Theophilus left.

It was from Theophilus that Charlotte learned of the great scene in the Abbey. Of the tributes paid to Colley. The noble flowers that had covered the bier. The many genteel and respected persons who had stood to attention in his honour.

She cried but little, because so few tears remained for her to shed.

"I wanted only the satisfaction of knowing my name was no longer hateful to him, whom I am bound still to cherish in my heart and tenderly revere."

"I think he did know and forgave you in his heart, Charlotte." Even if Theophilus did not believe it, he said so, a little to comfort her.

#### IV

On the 26th of August 1758 Charlotte's name made a brief reappearance on a playbill outside London. She appeared in Canterbury and returned again to town, where, in something under two months she learned the tragic news of her brother's death. A kind of strange quirk of fate had made it that as he was born in a storm, so he should die in one.

Charlotte sat, her face implacable, her eyes dry, as she tried to realise this the latest, but not quite the last of "the manifold distresses" she was to suffer.

Theophilus had set out for Ireland and the Dublin stage, in search of, if hardly his fortune, at least his bread. He had gone in mixed company; with pantomimists and Irish peers; English players and wire dancers. The ship which was bearing them from coast to coast foundered in the Irish Sea during the storm.

This, then, was the end of Charlotte's ugly, hawk-nosed, dissolute brother, of whom Pope had written almost as slightly as of Colley himself:

*"Mark first that youth who takes the foremost place,  
And thrusts his person full into your face,  
With all they father's virtues blest, be born!  
And a new Cibber shall the stage adorn."*

Charlotte swallowed, aware of a choking sensation. Of her family, Theophilus had done the most for her. He had not cast her out or lost opportunity to place work in her way. It had not been his wish that Jenny be taken from the Haymarket because Charlotte was left in control.

"Dear Theophilus——"

But her grief was soundless and the words would not come.

#### V

That was not quite the end of a strange "unaccountable life", for the 7th of August, 1759, Charlotte wrote to the Lord Chamberlain (the Duke of Devonshire) to implore him, in that

"vacant season of the year" for permission "to perform for ten nights only at the Haymarket Theatre".

She humbly hoped, "for sake of the memory of my late father, Colley Cibber" that His Grace would:

"permit the daughter who was bred to the stage to take an honest chance for these few nights of establishing herself in a way of business which will make her happy . . ."

The state of Charlotte's health obliged her "to decline" her profession in the winter months. Since both theatres were shut in the summer, she did not see that there could be any "detriment to those whose happier fortunes" made it possible to act in the prescribed playing season.

"If your Grace's wonted tenderness to the distressed will extend itself to me in this case, I beg you'll give an immediate order to any of your servants to write your pleasure."

Charlotte directed that the reply should go to her "at Mrs. Hinds in Leicester Street near Swallow Street, Piccadilly."

The New River Head had been but one of many temporary places of abode. And now she was back nearer the theatres.

She signed the letter simply, without any ostentation or flourish, as His Grace's:

"most devoted and obedient servant,  
CHARLOTTE CHARKE,  
formerly Cibber."

She received her permit and at the Haymarket, on 28th September, her name appeared on the play bill of *The Busybody*. The piece was: "for benefit of Mrs. Charke," under which information ran an all too familiar legend:

"As I am entirely dependent on Chance for a subsistence and desirous of settling into business, I humbly trust the town will favour me on the occasion, which added to the rest of their indulgencies will be ever gratefully acknowledged . . ."

"Settling into business." As writer, or the long-shelved project as a teacher of acting? This "oratorical academy, for the instruction of those who have any hopes, from genius and

figures of appearing on either of the London stages, or York, Norwich and Bath, all of which are reputable."

How was it she had once thought to frame the scheme? It was to have been an Academy of Acting, where, "on reasonable terms, three times a week" she was prepared to "pay constant attendance from ten in the morning 'till eight in the evening". Instructing "ladies and gentlemen" to speak and to act. Even though they never became professionals at least, she thought, they would make the reading of a play aloud more agreeable to a listener.

Only the scheme never progressed beyond "my intended academy".

With mild satire, Charlotte had written a dedication to herself in "the narrative". In it she referred to her:

"Exquisite taste in building . . . those magnificent airy castles for which she daily drew up plans without foundation."

And in that she provided, perhaps unwittingly, a self-epitaph.

If to be fiercely individual ranked as sin, then Charlotte must reckon herself a grievous sinner.

But now she knew that she was a tired, sick woman. That the lamp of hope burned no longer brightly, but with the feeblest flicker.

"What have I to live for longer?" she asked, when, leaving the Haymarket, she faced another winter of want.

She had lost all she had ever had. Father, brother, two husbands, friends, and, in a sense, her daughter, Kitty, as well.

"Little do they care for my misfortunes!"

Reason told her that the Harmans doubtless had troubles in plenty themselves. For they were still—so far as Charlotte knew—touring the countryside with their own company.

"Non pareil of the age."

Had Charlotte really written that about herself?

"Desirous of settling into business."

In the spring she would make a fresh start.

"I still have a mind to try my hand at——" then somehow her weary brain seemed to pause, as if plans no longer sprang to being with the old easy confidence in success.

"I will think of something. Perhaps another benefit in summer——"



But Charlotte did not live to see another summer . . .

On 6th April, 1760, *The Gentleman's Magazine*, which ever showed disapproval of her adventures, made a simple announcement of her passing. And below this, printed a poem of four stark lines:

*"Death to you is profitable;  
Now you need nor put nor table;  
And what you never had before,  
You've a house for ever more."*

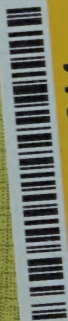
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YOUNG MAN'S SLAVE	BLUE SHUTTERS
NIGHT BELL	PEACOCK HILL
DOUBTING HEART	ECHO OF APPLAUSE
APRON STRINGS	RESTLESS DREAM
THEME SONG	PILOT'S POINT
CARETAKER WITHIN	SPIDER DANCE
THE RELUCTANT BRIDE	SIX WAX CANDLES
ONLY HER HUSBAND	GUILT'S PAVILIONS
WOMAN AT THE WHEEL	UNWISE WANDERER
MAN ALWAYS PAYS	FIVE HOUSES
NONE BETTER LOVED	SHE MARRIED ANOTHER
BRIDIN' HIGH	CUCKOO COTTAGE
THE BRAVE LIVE ON	MIDNIGHT IS MINE
TIME ON HER HANDS	FIDDLER'S GREEN
RIDDLE OF A LADY	







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